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DEATH BY
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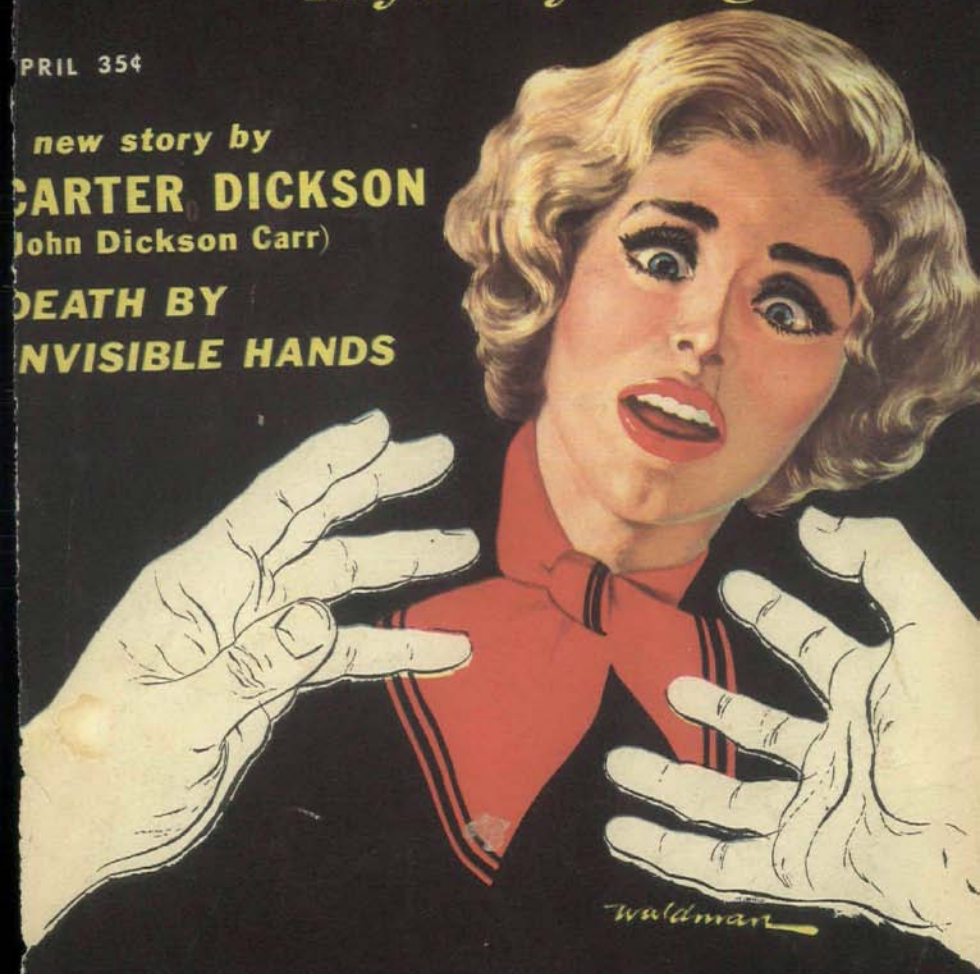

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The best of the new and the best of the old

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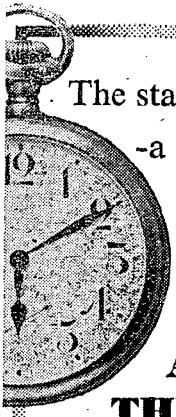

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

a new story by

AUTHOR: **CARTER DICKSON**
(John Dickson Carr)

TITLE: ***Death by Invisible Hands***

DETECTIVE: Dr. Gideon Fell

LOCALE: North Cornwall, England

TIME: Summer of 1956

COMMENTS: *John Dickson Carr's celebrated specialty: "the locked room," the impossible crime, the miracle problem, the always fascinating "murder as if by magic" . . .*

HE COULD NEVER UNDERSTAND afterward why he felt uneasiness, even to the point of fear, before he saw the beach at all.

Night and fancies? But how far can fancies go?

It was a steep track down to the beach. The road, however, was good, and he could rely on his car. And yet, halfway down, before he could even taste the sea-wind or hear the rustle of the sea, Dan Fraser felt sweat on his forehead. A nerve jerked in the calf of his leg over the foot brake.

"Look, this is damn silly!" he thought to himself. He thought it with a kind of surprise, as when he had first known fear in wartime long ago. But the fear had been real enough, no matter how well he concealed it, and they believed he never felt it.

A dazzle of lightning lifted ahead of him. The night was too hot. This enclosed road, bumping the springs of his car, seemed pressed down in an airless hollow.

After all, Dan Fraser decided, he had everything to be thankful for. He was going to see Brenda; he was the luckiest man in London. If she chose to spend weekends as far away as North Cornwall, he was glad to drag himself there—even a day late.

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Brenda's image rose before him, as clearly as the flash of lightning. He always seemed to see her half laughing, half pouting, with light on her yellow hair. She was beautiful; she was desirable. It would only be disloyalty to think any trickiness underlay her intense, naive ways.

Brenda Lestrange always got what she wanted. And she had wanted him, though God alone knew why: he was no prize package at all. Again, in imagination, he saw her against the beat and shuffle of music in a night club. Brenda's shoulders rose from a low-cut silver gown, her eyes as blue and wide-spaced as the eternal Eve's.

You'd have thought she would have preferred a dasher, a roaring bloke like Toby Curtis, who had all the women after him. But that, as Joyce had intimated, might be the trouble. Toby Curtis couldn't see Brenda for all the rest of the crowd. And so Brenda preferred—

Well, then, what was the matter with him?

He would see Brenda in a few minutes. There ought to have been joy bells in the tower, not bats in the—

Easy!

He was out in the open now, at sea level. Dan Fraser drove bumpingly along scrub grass, at the head of a few shallow terraces leading down to the private beach. Ahead of him, facing seaward, stood the overlarge, overdecorated bungalow which Brenda had rather grandly named "The King's House."

And there wasn't a light in it—not a light showing at only a quarter past ten.

Dan cut the engine, switched off the lights, and got out of the car. In the darkness he could hear the sea charge the beach as an army might have charged it.

Twisting open the handle of the car's trunk, he dragged out his suitcase. He closed the compartment with a slam which echoed out above the swirl of water. This part of the Cornish coast was too lonely, too desolate, but it was the first time such a thought had ever occurred to him.

He went to the house, round the side and toward the front. His footsteps clacked loudly on the crazy-paved path on the side. And even in a kind of luminous darkness from the white of the breakers ahead, he saw why the bungalow showed no lights.

All the curtains were drawn on the windows—on this side, at least.

When Dan hurried round to the front door, he was almost running. He banged the iron knocker on the door, then hammered it again. As he glanced over his shoulder, another flash of lightning paled the sky to the west.

It showed him the sweep of gray sand. It showed black water snakily edged with foam. In the middle of the beach, unearthly, stood the

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small natural rock formation—shaped like a low-backed armchair, eternally facing out to sea—which for centuries had been known as King Arthur's Chair.

The white eye of the lightning closed. Distantly there was a shock of thunder.

This whole bungalow couldn't be deserted! Even if Edmund Ireton and Toby Curtis were at the former's house some distance along the coast, Brenda herself must be here. And Joyce Ray. And the two maids.

Dan stopped hammering the knocker. He groped for and found the knob of the door.

The door was unlocked.

He opened it on brightness. In the hall, rather overdecorated like so many of Brenda's possessions, several lamps shone on gaudy furniture and a polished floor. But the hall was empty too.

With the wind whisking and whistling at his back Dan went in and kicked the door shut behind him. He had no time to give a hail. At the back of the hall a door opened. Joyce Ray, Brenda's cousin, walked toward him, her arms hanging limply at her sides and her enormous eyes like a sleepwalker's.

"Then you did get here," said Joyce, moistening dry lips. "You did get here, after all."

"I—"

Dan stopped. The sight of her brought a new realization. It didn't explain his uneasiness or his fear—but it did explain much.

Joyce was the quiet one, the dark one, the unobtrusive one, with her glossy black hair and her subdued elegance. But she was the poor relation, and Brenda never let her forget it. Dan merely stood and stared at her. Suddenly Joyce's eyes lost their sleepwalker's look. They were gray eyes, with very black lashes; they grew alive and vivid, as if she could read his mind.

"Joyce," he blurted, "I've just understood something. And I never understood it before. But I've got to tell—"

"Stop!" Joyce cried.

Her mouth twisted. She put up a hand as if to shade her eyes.

"I know what you want to say," she went on. "But you're not to say it! Do you hear me?"

"Joyce, I don't know why we're standing here yelling at each other. Anyway, I—I didn't mean to tell you. Not yet, anyway. I mean, I must tell Brenda—"

"You can't tell Brenda!" Joyce cried.

"What's that?"

"You can't tell her anything, ever again," said Joyce. "Brenda's dead."

There are some words which at first do not even shock or stun. You just don't believe them. They can't be true. Very carefully Dan Fraser put his suitcase down on the floor and straightened up again.

"The police," said Joyce, swal-

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lowing hard, "have been here since early this morning. They're not here now. They've taken her away to the mortuary. That's where she'll sleep tonight."

Still Dan said nothing.

"Mr.—Mr. Edmund Ireton," Joyce went on, "has been here ever since it happened. So has Toby Curtis. So, fortunately, has a man named Dr. Gideon Fell. Dr. Fell's a bumbling old duffer, a very learned man or something. He's a friend of the police; he's kind; he's helped soften things. All the same, Dan, if *you'd* been here last night —"

"I couldn't get away. I told Brenda so."

"Yes, I know all that talk about hard-working journalists. But if you'd only been here, Dan, it might not have happened at all."

"Joyce, for God's sake!"

Then there was a silence in the bright, quiet room. A stricken look crept into Joyce's eyes.

"Dan, I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry. I was feeling dreadful and so, I suppose, I had to take it out on the first person handy."

"That's all right. But how did she die?" Then desperately he began to surmise. "Wait, I've got it! She went out to swim early this morning, just as usual? She's been diving off those rocks on the headland again? And—"

"No," said Joyce. "She was strangled."

"Strangled?"

What Joyce tried to say was "murdered." Her mouth shook and faltered round the syllables; she couldn't say them; her thoughts, it seemed, shied back and ran from the very word. But she looked at Dan steadily.

"Brenda went out to swim early this morning, yes."

"Well?"

"At least, she must have. I didn't see her. I was still asleep in that back bedroom she always gives me. Anyway, she went down there in a red swim suit and a white beach robe."

Automatically Dan's eyes moved over to an oil painting above the fireplace. Painted by a famous R.A., it showed a scene from classical antiquity; it was called *The Lovers,* and left little to the imagination. It had always been Brenda's favorite because the female figure in the picture looked so much like her.

"Well!" said Joyce, throwing out her hands. "You know what Brenda always does. She takes off her beach robe and spreads it out over King Arthur's Chair. She sits down in the chair and smokes a cigarette and looks out at the sea before she goes into the water.

"The beach robe was still in that rock chair," Joyce continued with an effort, "when I came downstairs at half-past seven. But Brenda wasn't. She hadn't even put on her bathing cap. Somebody had strangled her with that silk scarf she wore with the beach robe. It

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was twisted so tightly into her neck they couldn't get it out. She was lying on the sand in front of the chair, on her back, in the red swim suit, with her face black and swollen. You could see her clearly from the terrace."

Dan glanced at the flesh tints of *The Lovers,* then quickly looked away.

Joyce, the cool and competent, was holding herself under restraint.

"I can only thank my lucky stars," she burst out, "I didn't run out there. I mean, from the flagstones of the lowest terrace out across the sand. They stopped me."

" 'They' stopped you? Who?"

"Mr. Ireton and Toby. Or, rather, Mr. Ireton did; Toby wouldn't have thought of it."

"But—"

"Toby, you see, had come over here a little earlier. But he was at the back of the bungalow, practising with a .22 target rifle. I heard him once. Mr. Ireton had just got there. All three of us walked out on the terrace at once. And saw her."

"Listen, Joyce. What difference does it make whether or not you ran out across the sand? Why were you so lucky they stopped you?"

"Because if they hadn't, the police might have said I did it."

"Did it?"

"Killed Brenda," Joyce answered clearly. "In all that stretch of sand, Dan, there weren't any footprints except Brenda's own."

"Now hold on!" he protested. "She—she *was* killed with that scarf of hers?"

"Oh, yes. The police and even Dr. Fell don't doubt that."

"Then how could anybody, anybody at all, go out across the sand and come back without leaving a footprint?"

"That's just it. The police don't know and they can't guess. That's why they're in a flat spin, and Dr. Fell will be here again tonight."

In her desperate attempt to speak lightly, as if all this didn't matter, Joyce failed. Her face was white. But again the expression of the dark-fringed eyes changed, and she hesitated.

"Dan—"

"Yes?"

"You do understand, don't you, why I was so upset when you came charging in and said what you did?"

"Yes, of course."

"Whatever you had to tell me, or thought you had to tell me—"

"About—us?"

"About anything! You do see that you must forget it and not mention it again? Not ever?"

"I see why I can't mention it now. With Brenda dead, it wouldn't even be decent to think of it." He could not keep his eyes off that mocking picture. "But is the future dead too? If I happen to have been an idiot and thought I was head over heels gone on Brenda when all the time it was really—"

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"Dan!"

There were five doors opening into the gaudy hall, which had too many mirrors. Joyce whirled round to look at every door, as if she feared an ambush behind each.

"For heaven's sake keep your voice down," she begged. "Practically every word that's said can be heard all over the house. I said never, and I meant it. If you'd spoken a week ago, even twenty-four hours ago, it might have been different. Do you think I didn't want you to? But now it's too late!"

"Why?"

"May *I* answer that question?" interrupted a new, dry rather quizzical voice.

Dan had taken a step toward her, intensely conscious of her attractiveness. He stopped, burned with embarrassment, as one of the five doors opened.

Mr. Edmund Ireton, shortish and thin and dandified in his middle-fifties, emerged with his usual briskness. There was not much gray in his polished black hair. His face was a benevolent satyr's.

"Forgive me," he said.

Behind him towered Toby Curtis, heavy and handsome and fair-haired, in a bulky tweed jacket. Toby began to speak, but Mr. Ireton's gesture silenced him before he could utter a sound.

"Forgive me," he repeated. "But what Joyce says is quite true. Every word can be overheard here, even with the rain pouring down. If you go on shouting and Dr. Fell hears it, you will land that girl in serious danger."

"Danger?" demanded Toby Curtis. He had to clear his throat. "What danger could *Dan* get her into?"

Mr. Ireton, immaculate in flannels and shirt and thin pullover, stalked to the mantelpiece. He stared up hard at *The Lovers* before turning round.

"The Psalmist tells us," he said dryly, "that all is vanity. Has none of you ever noticed—God forgive me for saying so—that Brenda's most outstanding trait was her vanity?"

His glance flashed toward Joyce, who abruptly turned away and pressed her hands over her face.

"Appalling vanity. Scratch that vanity deeply enough and our dearest Brenda would have committed murder."

"Aren't you getting this backwards?" asked Dan. "Brenda didn't commit any murder. It was Brenda—"

"Ah!" Mr. Ireton pounced. "And there might be a lesson in that, don't you think?"

"Look here, you're not saying she strangled herself with her own scarf?"

"No—but hear what I do say. Our Brenda, no doubt, had many passions and many fancies. But there was only one man she loved

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or ever wanted to marry. It was not Mr. Dan Fraser."

"Then who was it?" asked Toby.

"You."

Toby's amazement was too genuine to be assumed. The color drained out of his face. Once more he had to clear his throat.

"So help me," he said, "I never knew it! I never imagined—"

"No, of course you didn't," Mr. Ireton said even more dryly. A goatish amusement flashed across his face and was gone. "Brenda, as a rule, could get any man she chose. So she turned Mr. Fraser's head and became engaged to him. It was to sting you, Mr. Curtis, to make you jealous. And you never noticed. While all the time Joyce Ray and Dan Fraser were eating their hearts out for each other; and *he* never noticed either."

Edmund Ireton wheeled round.

"You may lament my bluntness, Mr. Fraser. You may want to wring my neck, as I see you do. But can you deny one word I say?"

"No." In honesty Dan could not deny it.

"Well! Then be very careful when you face the police, both of you, or they will see it too. Joyce already has a strong motive. She is Brenda's only relative, and inherits Brenda's money. If they learn she wanted Brenda's *fiancé,* they will have her in the dock for murder."

"That's enough!" blurted Dan, who dared not look at Joyce.

"You've made it clear. All right, stop there!"

"Oh, I had intended to stop. If you are such fools that you won't help yourselves, I must help you. That's all."

It was Toby Curtis who strode forward.

"Dan, don't let him bluff you!" Toby said. "In the first place, they can't arrest anybody for this. You weren't here. I know—"

"I've heard about it, Toby."

"Look," insisted Toby. "When the police finished measuring and photographing and taking casts of Brenda's footprints, I did some measuring myself."

Edmund Ireton smiled. "Are *you* attempting to solve this mystery, Mr. Curtis?"

"I didn't say that." Toby spoke coolly. "But I might have a question or two for you. Why have you had your knife into me all day?"

"Frankly, Mr. Curtis, because I envy you."

"You—*what?*"

"So far as women are concerned, young man, I have not your advantages. *I* had no romantic boyhood on a veldt-farm in South Africa. *I* never learned to drive a span of oxen and flick a fly off the leader's ear with my whip. *I* was never taught to be a spectacular horseman and rifle shot."

"Oh, turn it up!"

"'Turn it up?' Ah, I see. And was that the sinister question you had for me?"

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"No. Not yet. You're too tricky."

"My profoundest thanks."

"Look, Dan," Toby insisted. "You've seen that rock formation they call King Arthur's Chair?"

"Toby, I've seen it fifty times," Dan said. "But I still don't understand—"

"And I don't understand," suddenly interrupted Joyce, without turning round, "why they made me sit there where Brenda had been sitting. It was horrible."

"Oh, they were only reconstructing the crime." Toby spoke rather grandly. "But the question, Dan, is how anybody came near that chair without leaving a footprint?"

"Quite."

"Nobody could have," Toby said just as grandly. "The murderer, for instance, couldn't have come from the direction of the sea. Why? Because the highest point at high tide, where the water might have blotted out footprints, is more than twenty feet in front of the chair. More than twenty feet!"

"Er—one moment," said Mr. Ireton, twitching up a finger. "Surely Inspector Tregellis said the murderer must have crept up and caught her from the back? Before she knew it?"

"That won't do either. From the flagstones of the terrace to the back of the chair is at least twenty feet, too. Well, Dan? Do you see any way out of that one?"

Dan, not normally slow-witted, was so concentrating on Joyce that he could think of little else. She was cut off from him, drifting away from him, forever out of reach just when he had found her. But he tried to think.

"Well . . . could somebody have jumped there?"

"Ho!" scoffed Toby, who was himself a broad jumper and knew better. "That was the first thing they thought of."

"And that's out, too?"

"Definitely. An Olympic champion in good form might have done it, if he'd had any place for a running start and any place to land. But he hadn't. There was *no* mark in the sand. He couldn't have landed on the chair, strangled Brenda at his leisure, and then hopped back like a jumping bean. Now could he?"

"But somebody did it, Toby! It happened!"

"How?"

"I don't know."

"You seem rather proud of this, Mr. Curtis," Edmund Ireton said smoothly.

"Proud?" exclaimed Toby, losing color again.

"These romantic boyhoods—"

Toby did not lose his temper. But he had declared war.

"All right, gaffer. I've been very grateful for your hospitality, at that bungalow of yours, when we've come down here for week-ends. All the same, you've been going on for hours about who I am and what I am. Who are *you?*"

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"I beg your pardon?"

"For two or three years," Toby said, "you've been hanging about with us. Especially with Brenda and Joyce. Who are you? What are you?"

"I am an observer of life," Mr. Ireton answered tranquilly. "A student of human nature. And—shall I say?—a courtesy uncle to both young ladies."

"Is that all you were? To either of them?"

"Toby!" exclaimed Joyce, shocked out of her fear.

She whirled round, her gaze going instinctively to Dan, then back to Toby.

"Don't worry, old girl," said Toby, waving his hand at her. "This is no reflection on you." He kept looking steadily at Mr. Ireton.

"Continue," Mr. Ireton said politely.

"You claim Joyce is in danger. She isn't in any danger at all," said Toby, "as long as the police don't know how Brenda was strangled."

"They will discover it, Mr. Curtis. Be sure they will discover it!"

"You're trying to protect Joyce?"

"Naturally."

"And that's why you warned Dan not to say he was in love with her?"

"Of course. What else?"

Toby straightened up, his hand inside the bulky tweed jacket.

"Then why didn't you take him outside, rain or no, and tell him on the quiet? Why did *you* shout out that Dan was in love with Joyce, and she was in love with him, and give 'em a motive for the whole house to hear?"

Edmund Ireton opened his mouth, and shut it again.

It was a blow under the guard, all the more unexpected because it came from Toby Curtis.

Mr. Ireton stood motionless under the painting of *The Lovers*. The expression of the pictured Brenda, elusive and mocking, no longer matched his own. Whereupon, while nerves were strained and still nobody spoke, Dan Fraser realized that there was a dead silence because the rain had stopped.

Small night-noises, the creak of woodwork or a drip of water from the eaves, intensified the stillness. Then they heard footsteps, as heavy as those of an elephant, slowly approaching behind another of the doors. The footfalls, heavy and slow and creaking, brought a note of doom.

Into the room, wheezing and leaning on a stick, lumbered a man so enormous that he had to maneuver himself sideways through the door.

His big mop of gray-streaked hair had tumbled over one ear. His eyeglasses, with a broad black ribbon, were stuck askew on his nose. His big face would ordinarily have been red and beaming, with chuckles animating several chins. Now it was only absent-minded, his bandit's mustache outthrust.

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"Aha!" he said in a rumbling voice. He blinked at Dan with an air of refreshed interest. "I think you must be Mr. Fraser, the last of this rather curious week-end party? H'm. Yes. Your obedient servant, sir. I am Gideon Fell."

Dr. Fell wore a black cloak as big as a tent and carried a shovel-hat in his other hand. He tried to bow and make a flourish with his stick, endangering all the furniture near him.

The others stood very still. Fear was as palpable as the scent after rain.

"Yes, I've heard of you," said Dan. His voice rose in spite of himself. "But you're rather far from home, aren't you? I suppose you had some—er—antiquarian interest in King Arthur's Chair?"

Still Dr. Fell blinked at him. For a second it seemed that chuckles would jiggle his chins and waistcoat, but he only shook his head.

"Antiquarian interest? My dear sir!" Dr. Fell wheezed gently. "If there were any association with a semi-legendary King Arthur, it would be at Tintagel much farther south. No, I was here on holiday. This morning, Inspector Tregellis fascinated me with the story of a fantastic murder. I returned tonight for my own reasons."

Mr. Ireton, at ease again, matched the other's courtesy. "May I ask what these reasons were?"

"First, I wished to question the two maids. They have a room at the back, as Miss Ray has; and this afternoon, you may remember, they were still rather hysterical."

"And that is all?"

"H'mf. Well, no." Dr. Fell scowled. "Second, I wanted to detain all of you here for an hour or two. Third, I must make sure of the motive for this crime. And I am happy to say that I have made very sure."

Joyce could not control herself. "Then you did overhear everything!"

"Eh?"

"Every word that man said!"

Despite Dan's signals, Joyce nodded toward Mr. Ireton and poured out the words. "But I swear I hadn't anything to do with Brenda's death. What I told you today was perfectly true: I don't want her money and I won't touch it. As for my—my private affairs," and Joyce's face flamed, "everybody seems to know all about them except Dan and me. Please, please pay no attention to what that man has been saying."

Dr. Fell blinked at her in an astonishment which changed to vast distress.

"But, my dear young lady!" he rumbled. "We never for a moment believed you did. No, no! Archons of Athens, no!" exclaimed Dr. Fell, as though at incredible absurdity. "As for what your friend Mr. Ireton may have been saying, I did not hear it. I suspect it was only what he told me today, and it did

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supply the motive. But it was not your motive."

"Please, is this true? You're not trying to trap me?"

"Do I really strike you," Dr. Fell asked gently, "as being that sort of person? Nothing was more unlikely than that you killed your cousin, especially in the way she was killed."

"Do you know how she was killed?"

"Oh, *that,*" grunted Dr. Fell, waving the point away too. "That was the simplest part of the whole business."

He lumbered over, reflected in the mirrors and put down stick and shovel-hat on a table. Afterward he faced them with a mixture of distress and apology.

"It may surprise you," he said, "that an old scatterbrain like myself can observe anything at all. But I have an unfair advantage over the police. I began life as a schoolmaster: I have had more experience with habitual liars. Hang it all, think!"

"Of what?"

"The facts!" said Dr. Fell, making a hideous face. "According to the maids, Sonia and Dolly, Miss Brenda Lestrange went down to swim at ten minutes to seven this morning. Both Dolly and Sonia were awake, but did not get up. Some eight or ten minutes later, Mr. Toby Curtis began practising with a target rifle some distance away behind the bungalow."

"Don't look at me!" exclaimed Toby. "That rifle has nothing to do with it. Brenda wasn't shot."

"Sir," said Dr. Fell with much patience, "I am aware of that."

"Then what are you hinting at?"

"Sir," said Dr. Fell, "you will oblige me if you too don't regard every question as a trap. I have a trap for the murderer, and the murderer alone. You fired a number of shots—the maids heard you and saw you." He turned to Joyce. "I believe you heard too?"

"I heard one shot," answered the bewildered Joyce, "as I told Dan. About seven o'clock, when I got up and dressed."

"Did you look out of the windows?"

"No."

"What happened to that rifle afterwards? Is it here now?"

"No," Toby almost yelled. "I took it back to Ireton's after we found Brenda. But if the rifle had nothing to do with it, and I had nothing to do with it, then what the hell's the point?"

Dr. Fell did not reply for a moment. Then he made another hideous face. "We know," he rumbled, "that Brenda Lestrange wore a beach robe, a bathing suit, and a heavy silk scarf knotted round her neck. Miss Ray?"

"Y-yes?"

"I am not precisely an authority on women's clothes," said Dr. Fell. "As a rule I should notice nothing odd unless I passed Madge Wild-

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fire or Lady Godiva. I have seen men wear a scarf with a beach robe, but is it customary for women to wear a scarf as well?"

There was a pause.

"No, of course it isn't," said Joyce. "I can't speak for everybody, but I never do. It was just one of Brenda's fancies. She always did."

"Aha!" said Dr. Fell. "The murderer was counting on that."

"On what?"

"On her known conduct. Let me show you rather a grisly picture of a murder."

Dr. Fell's eyes were squeezed shut. From inside his cloak and pocket he fished out an immense meerschaum pipe. Firmly under the impression that he had filled and lighted the pipe, he put the stem in his mouth and drew at it.

"Miss Lestrange," he said, "goes down to the beach. She takes off her robe. Remember that, it's very important. She spreads out the robe in King Arthur's Chair and sits down. She is still wearing the scarf, knotted tightly in a broad band round her neck. She is about the same height as you, Miss Ray. She is held there, at the height of her shoulders, by a curving rock formation deeply bedded in sand."

Dr. Fell paused and opened his eyes.

"The murderer, we believe, catches her from the back. She sees and hears nothing until she is seized. Intense pressure on the carotid arteries, here at either side of the neck under the chin, will strike her unconscious within seconds and dead within minutes. When her body is released, it should fall straight forward. Instead, what happens?"

To Dan, full of relief ever since danger had seemed to leave Joyce, it was as if a shutter had flown open in his brain.

"She was lying on her back," Dan said. "Joyce told me so. Brenda was lying flat on her back with her head towards the sea. And that means—"

"Yes?"

"It means she was twisted or spun round in some way when she fell. It has something to do with that infernal scarf—I've thought so from the first. Dr. Fell! Was Brenda killed with the scarf?"

"In one sense, yes. In another sense, no."

"You can't have it both ways! Either she was killed with the scarf, or she wasn't."

"Not necessarily," said Dr. Fell.

"Then let's all retire to a loony bin," Dan suggested, "because nothing makes any sense at all. The murderer still couldn't have walked out there without leaving tracks. Finally, I agree with Toby: what's the point of the rifle? How does a .22 rifle figure in all this?"

"Because of its sound."

Dr. Fell took the pipe out of his mouth. Dan wondered why he had ever thought the learned doctor's

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eyes were vague. Magnified behind the glasses on the broad black ribbon, they were not vague at all.

"A .22 rifle," he went on in his big voice, "has a distinctive noise. Fired in the open air or anywhere else, it sounds exactly like the noise made by the real instrument used in this crime."

"Real instrument? What noise?"

"The crack of a blacksnake whip," replied Dr. Fell.

Edmund Ireton, looking very tired and ten years older, went over and sat down in an easy chair. Toby Curtis took one step backward, then another.

"In South Africa," said Dr. Fell, "I have never seen the very long whip which drivers of long ox spans use. But in America I have seen the blacksnake whip, and it can be twenty-four feet long. You yourselves must have watched it used in a variety turn on the stage."

Dr. Fell pointed his pipe at them.

"Remember?" he asked. "The user of the whip stands some distance away facing his girl assistant. There is a vicious crack. The end of the whip coils two or three times round the girl's neck. She is not hurt. But she would be in difficulties if he pulled the whip towards him. She would be in grave danger if she were held back and could not move.

"Somebody planned a murder with a whip like that. He came here early in the morning. The whip, coiled round his waist, was hidden by a loose and bulky tweed jacket. Please observe the jacket Toby Curtis is wearing now."

Toby's voice went high when he screeched out one word. It may have been protest, defiance, a jeer, or all three.

"Stop this!" cried Joyce, who had again turned away.

"Continue, I beg," Mr. Ireton said.

"In the dead hush of morning," said Dr. Fell, "he could not hide the loud crack of the whip. But what could he do?"

"He could mask it," said Edmund Ireton.

"Just that! He was always practising with a .22 rifle. So he fired several shots, behind the bungalow, to establish his presence. Afterwards nobody would notice when the crack of the whip—that single, isolated 'shot' heard by Miss Ray—only seemed to come from behind the house."

"Then, actually, he was—?"

"On the terrace, twenty feet behind a victim held immovable in the curve of a stone chair. The end of the whip coiled round the scarf. Miss Lestrange's breath was cut off instantly. Under the pull of a powerful arm she died in seconds.

"On the stage, you recall, a lift and twist dislodges the whip from the girl-assistant's neck. Toby Curtis had a harder task; the scarf was so embedded in her neck that she

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seemed to have been strangled with it. He *could* dislodge it. But only with a powerful whirl and lift of the arm which spun her up and round, to fall face upwards. The whip snaked back to him with no trace in the sand. Afterwards he had only to take the whip back to Mr. Ireton's house, under pretext of returning the rifle. He had committed a murder which, in his vanity, he thought undetectable. That's all."

"But it can't be all!" said Dan. "Why should Toby have killed her? His motive—"

"His motive was offended vanity. Mr. Edmund Ireton as good as told you so, I fancy. He had certainly hinted as much to me."

Edmund Ireton rose shakily from the chair.

"I am no judge or executioner," he said. "I—I am detached from life. I only observe. If I guessed why this was done—"

"You could never speak straight out?" Dr. Fell asked sardonically.

"No!"

"And yet that was the tragic irony of the whole affair. Miss Lestrange wanted Toby Curtis, as he wanted her. But, being a woman, her pretense of indifference and contempt was too good. He believed it. Scratch her vanity deeply enough and she would have committed murder. Scratch *his* vanity deeply enough—"

"Lies!" said Toby.

"Look at him, all of you!" said Dr. Fell. "Even when he's accused of murder, he can't take his eyes off a mirror."

"*Lies!*"

"She laughed at him," the big voice went on, "and so she had to die. Brutally and senselessly he killed a girl who would have been his for the asking. That is what I meant by tragic irony."

Toby had retreated across the room until his back bumped against a wall. Startled, he looked behind him; he had banged against another mirror.

"Lies!" he kept repeating. "You can talk and talk and talk. But there's not a single damned thing you can prove!"

"Sir," inquired Dr. Fell, "are you sure?"

"Yes!"

"I warned you," said Dr. Fell, "that I returned tonight partly to detain all of you for an hour or so. It gave Inspector Tregellis time to search Mr. Ireton's house, and the Inspector has since returned. I further warned you that I questioned the maids, Sonia and Dolly, who today were only incoherent. My dear sir, you underestimate your personal attractions."

Now it was Joyce who seemed to understand. But she did not speak.

"Sonia, it seems," and Dr. Fell looked hard at Toby, "has quite a fondness for you. When she heard that last isolated 'shot' this morning, she looked out of the window again. You weren't there. This was

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so strange that she ran out to the front terrace to discover where you were. She saw you."

The door by which Dr. Fell had entered was still open. His voice lifted and echoed through the hall.

"Come in, Sonia!" he called. "After all, you are a witness to the murder. You, Inspector, had better come in too."

Toby Curtis blundered back, but there was no way out. There was only a brief glimpse of Sonia's swollen, tear-stained face. Past her marched a massive figure in uniform, carrying what he had found hidden in the other house.

Inspector Tregellis was reflected everywhere in the mirrors, with the long coils of the whip over his arm. And he seemed to be carrying not a whip but a coil of rope —gallows rope.

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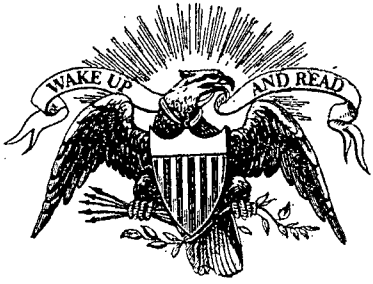

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THOMAS WALSH**

TITLE: ***A Chump To Hold the Bag***

TYPE: Cop Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *What makes a cop? Blue shirt, blue pants, blue coat, some buttons, a shield, and a gun? No, there's more to a cop than that.*

THE ONE SOUND CAME FROM behind him distinct and flat but not very loud, so that at first Mickey Gavegan wasn't altogether sure whether or not it was a shot. As soon as he heard it, he stopped on the pavement and turned completely about, looking back uneasily along the row of tenements that lined this side of the street to the corner. It came from somewhere in there, Mickey Gavegan thought, the uneasiness stirring stronger in him.

A woman ran out onto the lamplit street through the front door of the house on the corner. Mickey Gavegan heard one word in the frantic shrillness of her screams: "Police! Police! Police!"

He looked back at her uncertainly with a lumpy panic catching at his breath. He took one step toward her and stopped, and then, when a police whistle squealed on the avenue, without thinking, instinctively, he turned and ran up the low stoop behind him. Pounding through a dim hall there, out a rear door to a yard, across a fence to another yard beyond, he stopped breathlessly in the shadow of a building—big and awkward in a well-worn gray suit, with a felt hat turned down in front cutting all light sharply away from his eyes and the pointed, high angles of his cheekbones. Why had he run? He was just coming home from the movies, walking along—

Blocks away a police-car siren whined intolerably against the night. He licked his lips at the sound, turned toward it, hesitated,

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then froze. A window went up somewhere above him; in the street beyond, the woman's voice, insane and uncontrolled, screamed on wildly. Another window was raised; one man called to another across the court. Mickey Gavegan ran into the hallway, through a front door, out to the street.

A car racing up from the avenue missed him by a foot as he crossed the road; he was scarcely conscious of it. He ran through an alley, cut west two blocks, north another, slowing to a fast walk that kept him half concealed in the shadows of the buildings, with the siren passing him on the way, whining and close, pouring its incredible rasp over all other sounds like a sea of solid chaos extending about him with the speed of light.

He couldn't control the panic it roused in him. Even when he had reached his doorway, his fingers trembled clumsily when he grabbed his keys, and perspiration stung his forehead, blurred on the lashes of his small black eyes. Crazy, he thought; what was wrong with him? But only after he had slipped quietly up four flights of stairs to the top-floor front apartment he shared with Luke Daly did the tight band loosen in his chest.

He did not switch on the lights. Stripping off his clothes quickly, getting into bed so that everything would be innocent and quiet when Luke Daly got home, two sullen lines creased into the flesh around his stubby nose. Cops—this time they couldn't question him.

Wakeful in the dark, he thought bitterly about that other time, remembering that he'd been dumb then, a kid, telling them the truth over and over, stupid enough to think they were going to believe it. He admitted he was in the car; he admitted he was driving it. But he didn't know it was stolen, and he didn't know Jack Bohannon was pulling any holdup.

That night, he said, he was just hanging around the corner when Jack Bohannon pulled up and asked him if he'd like to try the new bus out. So they rode around for a while, Mickey Gavegan driving, and then they stopped on the avenue because Bohannon said he wanted to get some cigarettes. And Bohannon went into the store, and after a while came out again, running, with a guy after him, yelling, and a cop coming out from somewhere. He just sat there, Mickey Gavegan said; he didn't know what it was all about. And then Bohannon ducked into a subway entrance because the cop was between him and the car, and Mickey Gavegan got out from behind the wheel kind of nervous, thinking maybe he'd better beat it too. He was just beginning to walk away when somebody pointed at him, and the cop grabbed him. And then he was hooked; then, no matter how many times he told his

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story, nobody would believe him.

The prosecutor didn't; the jury didn't; the judge didn't—he gave young Michael Gavegan two and a half years.

So he went up the river and served his time. His mother was dead then, and only Luke Daly came up once a month to see him. Bohannon had been smart; Bohannon had skipped out. No one around the neighborhood saw him or heard of him. After a while Mickey Gavegan didn't even bother to ask Luke Daly about him . . .

In the yard, at exercise time, Mickey Gavegan heard a lot of stories about cops—how yellow they were, how crooked, how cruel. Everyone had his own story about them, and Mickey Gavegan never got tired listening to them. Cops! Mickey Gavegan got to spitting out of the corner of his mouth whenever anybody mentioned one.

Then, after he got out and went to live with Luke Daly while he hunted a job, Luke made the list—and became a cop.

In the morning papers the next day, after Luke Daly had gone off to duty, he read that a man named Dingbat Green had been shot dead in a tenement doorway at half-past eleven last night. His wife had heard the shot and found him in the entry; she had heard some people running through the yard but she had not seen them, and she had not seen Mickey Gavegan. He read all the papers, and all said the same thing. No one had seen him; he was safe.

That night, smoking in the armchair with his eyes wrinkled up thoughtfully in his lean homely face, Luke Daly gave him his idea of it.

"It ties in with those four guys who got away with a hundred thousand in that payroll job," he said. "We found that out. This Dingbat was talking about it in O'Brien's place last night, an hour before he was killed—saying he'd get his cut out of that or something was going to break. Joe Glennon got a tip on what was going on and went down there to pick Dingbat up, but missed him by five minutes. He was on his way over to the house when Dingbat got it."

"Dingbat liked his liquor," Mickey Gavegan said. "I guess it made him talk too much."

Luke Daly said slowly, "This is how I figure it, Mike. Whoever bossed that payroll job was smart enough to know what anybody like Dingbat Green would do with twenty grand or so in his pocket. He knew he'd tear the town wide open and put the finger right on himself—and on the others too. So I think he didn't split the money right away—he gave them maybe a couple of hundred each and held back the rest until things got quieter. But Dingbat gets drunk

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and begins to bellyache, and this other bird hears what he's saying, or somebody passes him the word. So he rubs out Dingbat right away, to save himself—and maybe to split what's left just three ways instead of four."

"I guess that's it," Mickey Gavegan agreed, trying not to seem too interested. He looked at a bracelet Luke Daly had bought that day for his girl; and afterward, when Luke Daly, all decked out, had started out to see her, he sat around for a while reading the papers again.

His face looked dull and tired when he raised it at the knock on the door. He said, "Huh? Come in," and a thin man in a brown topcoat and a soft hat turned down all around opened the door, closed it after him, and leaned against it with his hands in his pockets.

"Hello, Gavegan," he said, his small mouth smiling in his long, pale face. "How're tricks?"

Mickey Gavegan looked at him across the room; he knew him right away. "Bohannon," he said. "Jack Bohannon. What—" His throat got kind of dry; he swallowed to clear it.

"Yeah," Bohannon said, jerking his head backward. "I seen Daly go out a couple of minutes ago. When's he due back?"

"Late," Mickey Gavegan said automatically. Up there where they'd sent him he used to think that he'd meet Jack Bohannon again; and when he did— Something tingled in his fingers, as if a charged wire had touched him, and he got out of his chair slowly.

"Wait a minute," Bohannon said. He didn't move; his voice was casual. "Listen to what I got to tell you before you act up. I never knew you took the rap for that holdup until I got back in town last month; I figured you scrammed out of there the way I did. Why in hell didn't you?"

"Maybe," Mickey Gavegan said huskily, "because I didn't know what it was."

In the pale face across from him the brows arched outward in a shallow V.

"No," Bohannon said, watching him curiously. "I guess you didn't. You were always slow on the uptake." His voice was soft but his dark eyes were cold and serious. "As soon as I heard about it I figured I owed you something. Not that I'm scared of you— Don't get ideas. I'm no corner punk any more, Gavegan. I been around. I got connections, good connections. In Chi—" He raised his brows again. "That ain't here or there. I got a grand in my pocket, Gavegan—it don't square everything but it'll help."

"A grand?" Mickey Gavegan repeated. His mind did not take in the words; he spoke only because Bohannon paused.

"That's it." Bohannon nodded, watching him directly. "For what

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I owe you, and for something I want you to do. There's a guy I want to get in touch with, Gavegan, only he's ducked out of sight and I don't know where to find him. He's got a sister on the west side who could locate him—but she's never gonna do it for me. Just tonight, when I heard you were living with Daly, I got an idea how maybe you could work it out of her."

Raising his head so that his chin was tilted up, he nodded to the bedroom. "All you have to do is to put on the uniform Luke Daly's got in there. Then you're a cop, see? You're pretty near his size and it would fit you all right; she won't know any different. You tell her you're from the D.A.'s office and they want to get in touch with her brother. You say they want to protect him because they heard he's in trouble and somebody's plannin' to knock him off. That'll scare her all right; she'll tell you where he is then. Ain't you a cop? So you pick him up and take him to where I tell you—"

His hands spread wide on the table, his head lowered between his shoulders, Mickey Gavegan stared at him with glittering eyes.

For a moment Bohannon considered him. Then he said in an edged voice, "Or maybe I got to get tough with you. You want that, Gavegan? After that guy was shot last night I saw you running away, scared as hell. Say the cops got that tip phoned in to them tonight. You think they'd want to know why?"

"What?" Mickey Gavegan asked thickly. "You can't pull that. I never—"

"The cops might believe you," Bohannon said. He showed his teeth delicately, like a cat smiling. "And maybe they won't."

His voice stopped carelessly there. Cold inside, not scared, but upset and uneasy, Mickey Gavegan tried to think this out. But it was confused in his head, offering no place from which to start.

Bohannon gave him no time. Lifting his left arm, he glanced at his wrist watch.

"I got a black coupé parked downstairs with the keys in it. You get into it with Daly's uniform on in fifteen minutes or that call goes in to headquarters." Looking up, his eyes narrowed. "Or don't you think it would?"

Shaking his head, Mickey Gavegan said slowly, "I guess it would go in all right, Bohannon."

"I guess so too," the pale man added. He threw a piece of paper to the table. "The first address is where this sister lives; the second is where you bring this Joe Larkin when you get him. If he squawks about not going to headquarters you say the D.A. wants to see him personal; he's not taking chances on any leak from his office." He opened the door, nodded, said, "Fifteen minutes," and left.

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Even after Mickey Gavegan was alone, it seemed hard to get it all straight in his head. He thought of those guys in the cell block—how many claimed they had been framed? Say some of them lied; a few had told the truth. They'd done it to the other men and they'd do it to Gavegan. Unless . . .

He walked into the bedroom, opened the closet door, and looked at Luke Daly's uniform. Blue shirt, blue pants, blue coat, blue tie—some buttons, a shield, a holster, a gun. Then he looked at the paper Bohannon had left, which he held mechanically now in his hand. Ann Larkin, 441 Court Terrace; and under that 64 Arverne Road, Ransom's Beach.

He put the paper on the dresser, next to the jeweler's box that held the bracelet Luke Daly had shown him. Luke had forgotten that, he thought; but he'd be over at his girl's house probably before he found it out. Too late anyway to come back for it; he wouldn't be home now till twelve or one. And Mickey Gavegan could be through then, and safe; the suit would be hanging up the way Luke had left it, as if it had never been touched. Only—

Mickey Gavegan forced his mind away from that only. He kept it as empty and thoughtless as he could. He took off his clothes and put on Luke Daly's. Then he went out to the hall, listened there, and started down quietly, his head lowered.

Nobody met him in the hall; nobody noticed him on the street. He got into the black coupé that was parked where Bohannon had said it would be and drove across town to 441 Court Terrace. The number and the name were very clear in his mind; he did not have to look at Bohannon's paper. The number and the name, Ann Larkin—they might have been painted on a board before his eyes.

When she came into the front room where the landlady had asked Mickey Gavegan to wait, this Ann Larkin had a tension in her features that showed mostly in the trembling line of her lips.

"Yes?" she said, in a shaky voice, looking at him as he sat on the couch, in Luke Daly's uniform, with Luke Daly's cap on his knee. She was a tall girl, with steady, rather serious brown eyes, very slender in a dark blue dress. Her eyes were bright now with anxiety or fright, he could not tell which; but the moment he saw her, Mickey Gavegan knew he wouldn't have any trouble here.

Bohannon had been right: the uniform was enough. Mickey Gavegan repeated what Bohannon had told him to say, calm now, sure of himself, everything conquered, even the shame; and she listened to him quietly, her eyes meeting his, dropping away from them, all the while he spoke.

For a moment after he stopped she was silent; then she looked up

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at him again and said what, of all things, Mickey Gavegan had not expected her to say. She said in a soft breath, as if she weren't frightened any more: "I'm glad you came. It's—Joe will be glad too. He wanted to go to the police before—I told him to. But always, at the end, he was afraid to. Afraid of what that man would do. Joe wouldn't even tell me where he was living. All I have is a phone number."

When Mickey Gavegan asked her what that was, she shook her head at him.

"No. He wouldn't be there now—he never is before eleven. I think it's a restaurant where he goes to eat. They always have to see if he's there. But I'll go with you now, wherever you want; I'll call you for him at eleven. You see—" she looked at him with a timid, painful smile—"it may help him if I'm there. Please take me, too."

"I can't do that," Mickey Gavegan said. Bohannon wouldn't like this at all. "Sorry, lady."

"But I'm going," she told him, in an unsteady voice. "Why not? He hasn't done anything wrong. If they just want to talk to him I can be there. I can help."

It struck Mickey Gavegan that if he protested too much she might get obstinate; she might insist on calling the D.A.'s office herself.

The fall night, damp and rainy, seemed to seclude them very close together in the little coupé. As soon as they started off, she began to talk about her brother and that man he'd met. After a while Mickey Gavegan realized who she meant: Bohannon.

Moving around in his seat, grunting answers, he began to wish savagely that she'd shut up; he wasn't asking her life's history. How she'd left the small town upstate when her mother died, how she came here, got a job, and sent for Joe. Maybe, she said, it was all her fault, because if she hadn't sent for him he'd still be back home; he'd never have met that man. Did he—her face turned dimly to him—did he think this would be very serious?

Maybe not, he said shortly. He thought they could fix this up all right. Yes—her voice lifted there. They could, couldn't they? It wasn't as if Joe had done anything terrible; he'd just taken the bag Bohannon had given him and put it in a safe-deposit box downtown. He didn't know what was in it; and when he suspected, from what Bohannon let slip one night, he was afraid to go to the police, he slipped out of sight because he didn't want to have anything to do with it. That was all he'd done, and they couldn't punish him for it, when they understood how it was. The bag? The one with the money—the money Bohannon and his friends had stolen last month in the payroll holdup.

Mickey Gavegan remembered then what Luke Daly had said

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about the holdup, and Dingbat Green and the leader who must be Bohannon; and he remembered the car that had passed him last night. That's where Bohannon had seen him, from the car, after he'd killed the other man. And he'd hooked in Joe Larkin the way he'd hooked in Mickey Gavegan years ago—a chump to hold the bag, a sucker who didn't know what was going on.

Mickey Gavegan's lips were strangely colorless in his set face went they came to the little village of Ransom's Beach, and he stepped under a light to look at the address on Bohannon's paper again.

Around them all the store fronts were dark, the streets deserted; rows of cottages sloped desolately away under the indifferent pale pools of street lights. He looked through his pockets for Bohannon's paper once, twice, a third time; he didn't find it. In his other suit maybe, left there when he changed. But Arverne Road anyway, and a low number; he remembered that much. The coupé went on more slowly then, until on a corner signpost he saw the letters he was watching for.

There was only one bungalow lit up, far down near the beach; he pulled in to the curb before it and told her to stay in the car, for he knew he had to see Bohannon alone, and tell him she was there too. Because she had said she knew Bohannon; and if she saw him first she'd never call her brother. She'd know then that Gavegan—

"I'll be back," he said harshly. "I'm not sure this is it."

After he rang, Bohannon opened the door, but his thin body was sheltered from the car by Mickey Gavegan's bulkier one. In the hall, with the door closed, Mickey Gavegan told him how it was; he listened, fretting at his lower lip.

"She knows me all right," he said when Mickey Gavegan was done. "You'll have to get her to put in the call. Tell her you're a little early, and the D.A. won't be here for a while. After she calls him I'll run things. That call is all we want out of her."

Outside on the street she was standing by the car, looking around. It was dark here, she said —scary. And her hand clung to his arm all the way up the stoop—a small hand he could crush in his, a hand that weighed nothing at all.

Mickey Gavegan seemed to feel it there even after they got inside, and he looked at his watch and said maybe she could call now; it was almost eleven. The touch of her hand seemed still on the coat. From the hall he heard her dial.

He went out to the kitchen and nodded silently at Bohannon, and then, when the other man went inside, he lit a cigarette. After a moment, when he heard her voice muted through the walls, he went out to the corridor that ran into the living-room arch.

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He didn't know what he was going to do. Why had he left the kitchen? There was a small room on his right that he looked into absently, his head aching—a tiny, bare pantry with one window high up in it not wide enough for a man. It was odd why he examined the room so very carefully, why he stood there motionless in the hall, listening to Ann Larkin's voice, panicky and breathless, in the room beside him. You aren't—this isn't—her chair pushed back. Where was the policeman?

"Who?" Bohannon said. Mickey Gavegan heard him chuckle—low, not too amused. "I guess the suit fits him pretty good at that, baby; only it ain't his. He's no more a cop than I am. Gavegan!"

When he stopped in the archway her eyes watched him with a kind of incredulous horror.

Mickey Gavegan did not look at her at all; he stood there rigidly, in Luke Daly's uniform, like a statue.

"I guess there ain't a cop within a mile of here," Bohannon said, "but at that I guess you could take a gander around from upstairs, Gavegan. See if anybody's getting nosy about the lights."

The girl never said a word; she just kept watching him as if she had lost the power to move her eyes. They seemed to stay on him when he went out to the stairs, and her hand, too, remained tangible on his arm. Upstairs, in a dark bedroom, he stood by a window.

A car came down the street, slowing as it passed the house. A cheap black sedan, like the one Luke Daly had, it reached the end of the block, turned around in a driveway there, and passed the house once more. On the boulevard it stopped a moment and then turned left, out of sight. Somebody looking for a number, he thought; there were a million models like Luke Daly's around. Still his heart began to beat unsteadily, and the quiet around him became an oppressive thing whose weight he could not endure.

So down the stairs again, into the living room, where Jack Bohannon sat on a corner of the table, and the girl, her eyes shaded darkly, moved her head aside as he came in so that she did not have to look at him. "All quiet?" Bohannon asked. Gavegan nodded. It wasn't Luke Daly; it couldn't be. For how could Luke Daly know where he was?

But while they sat there, waiting for Joe Larkin, things began to come together in Mickey Gavegan's mind. There was the paper Bohannon had given him, which he had lost; and there was the bracelet Luke Daly had bought for his girl. Had Gavegan put the paper on the dresser, forgetting it completely after he changed, so that Luke Daly, missing the bracelet before he reached his girl's house, came back for it and found the paper by its side?

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If it was there, Luke Daly would have found it, and he'd have seen Mickey Gavegan's gray suit rumpled on the bed. He'd have looked in the closet and found the uniform gone, and then puzzled, worried, he'd have driven over to the first address, the landlady's. And she'd have told him Miss Larkin had gone out some time ago. Yes. With a policeman. Was there any trouble?

He could see Luke Daly, cursing him, perplexed, not wanting to get him into any mess, coming down here to see what it was all about. Impersonating an officer—they could send Mickey Gavegan up for that—

In the house, in the dark kitchen, there was something that might have been the creak of a floorboard, the rasp of a door. Mickey Gavegan coughed and made the chair creak under him to cover it; when Bohannon looked at him he said to smother it entirely:

"I been thinking, Bohannon. A car passed me last night, maybe a minute after the shot; you could have seen me from inside it. Say you did—then you're the guy who killed the Dingbat."

"I am?" Bohannon said, in a lazy voice, as if he was just repeating the statement. But his eyes grew watchful—flat and depthless.

"You always used your head," Mickey Gavegan went on, trying to make himself believe that he only imagined the sound, he was imagining another, fainter, almost indistinguishable, that could have been the scuffle of a shoe on oilcloth. "You always had a sucker—me for that cigar store holdup, and Joe Larkin for this. That's the way you work, isn't it?"

"Then maybe it's a good way," Bohannon answered softly, regarding him with watchfulness, but no alarm. "I never got picked up, Gavegan. I roped you into that holdup—hell, it's over and done with now; you didn't know any more about what was going on than a baby. But you want to remember that they hooked you for it all the way, the way they'd hook you for killing the Dingbat if I talk. Unless—"

He turned his head sharply, as if he heard something now that Mickey Gavegan had not caught. Getting up suddenly and silently from the table, he was past the archway in two strides, peering down the hall. Then he snarled something and the hand in his coat pocket jerked up; sound and smoke rebounded from the wall in a roll of clamorous enormity.

The girl was on her feet. Had she screamed? Mickey Gavegan, not conscious of moving, was in the archway behind Bohannon's crouching form. "In the pantry," Bohannon said breathlessly. "A guy."

Straightening clear of the arch, with his body pressed flat to the wall and the gun extended before him in his right hand, Bohannon moved forward carefully on his

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toes. Behind him, Mickey Gavegan moved too, one step into the passage, with Luke Daly's gun in his hand, and Luke Daly's uniform on his back.

"Bohannon," Mickey Gavegan said. The band at his temple snapped with the word; his body lost its pain and its shame; it became in an instant supple and careful.

The pale man turned, and they looked at each other, and Luke Daly's gun was solid and sure in Mickey Gavegan's hand. For a moment Bohannon just watched him; then in a quiet and persuasive tone he said, "If you'll use your head, Gavegan, if you'll let me handle this the safe way—"

His voice was so quiet, his eyes so steady and sensible, that Mickey Gavegan did not watch his gun. The reports came, one, two, three, rapid and wild, even while Bohannon spoke.

The hall was quiet then. Smoke whirled and eddied in it like lazy fog. And Jack Bohannon lay very still, clumsily sprawled out, on the floor . . .

In the living room Luke Daly made him tell it all—how he got scared and ran at the shot last night because he didn't want to get mixed up in anything, how Bohannon came to see him, how he thought that if he didn't do what Bohannon wanted him to . . .

"You couldn't tell me," Luke Daly said bitterly. "You couldn't do anything as brilliant as that. This mess now—" He went to the window and looked out; coming back he said, "I don't think anybody heard us; I didn't see a light for blocks around. Give me the gun, Gavegan. I killed him. I heard him call the girl from a saloon and I followed him here and shot him when he fired at me."

"What?" Mike Gavegan asked huskily. "You can't do that. I won't let you."

"Who shot Bohannon?" Luke Daly asked the girl. His voice was tight and savage. "You know, sister. You're the only one who does. They sent him up once for something he never did—you heard Bohannon say that. And now this goes the way *you* tell it. Who shot Bohannon?"

"You shot him," she said. But she had turned to Luke Daly then. "I saw you. You came in and—"

"Sister," Luke Daly said, with his eyes gleaming, "we'll cook something up. Get into the coupé and scram out of here. Mike, take off the cap and the shield and no one will spot you. I'll give you five minutes before I call the precinct."

Half pulling Mickey Gavegan out across the porch, he said something else—that maybe they could clear the other business up. The holdup three years ago. And if they did, if the commission believed what Luke Daly and the girl would have to tell them about what Bohannon had admitted back there, that he

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didn't have anything to do with that holdup at all, that he hadn't known anything more about it than a baby—

"Maybe," Luke Daly said, shoving him into the car, "maybe you're not too dumb to make a pretty good cop."

He bounced back up the stairs. Mickey Gavegan stared after him and then got the coupé in gear. Driving off through the rain, he thought of unbelievable things.

Gavegan *the cop*—and the girl—

He drove on faster, once touching the cap beside him. There was a curious lightness in him, a prickling like bubbles in all his veins. Say he made the list—say, one day, he got in touch with her again. He remembered her fingers on his arm. Would they ever be there again?

Maybe they would, he thought. Just once—that was all he wanted. For even now, sure in his mind, was the knowledge that he would never let them go.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **WILLIAM O'FARRELL**

TITLE: ***The Girl on the Beach***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Florida—on the Gulf

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A powerful and impressive story, especially in the characterization and the telling . . . and you will meet one of the most repulsive females ever delineated on the printed page.*

THE CAR WAS A TWO-TONE CONvertible, red and white, with dolphin-like fins and lots of gingerbread. Garish, John Carter thought —too gaudy even for Florida's winter season which, this being December, would not start for another month. The car was Marla's choice, not his. A native Floridian, he did not feel the need of celebrating his escape from dreary cold by indulging extravagantly in color. The sun was enough for him—the golden sun, the warm, gray beach with its curious interlacings of violet shade, and the quick run across the sand to plunge into azure water. Once it had been like that—once upon a time . . .

Once upon a time, he thought, there was this here lucky prince that had it made. He had enough money, inherited, to get along on, he had an attractive wife and a good strong body, and his reflexes were normal and his mind was okay, too. Then one night he tripped over an empty orange crate, and *wham!* . . .

It was nine thirty in the morning and he and Marla were driving east along the Beach Road straight into the sun. He opened the glove compartment, got out a pair of dark glasses, and put them on.

"Want me to put the top up?" Marla asked.

"Why bother? We're almost there."

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Sitting on his left hip, as he was, and with his eyes shielded by the glasses, it was easy to study Marla without her knowledge. Except for her variable hair, she was a pleasant-looking girl, quiet in voice and appearance, and quite predictable. Twenty-eight years old—three years younger than himself—with high cheekbones and large gray eyes that should have been serene but, at the moment, were nothing of the kind. Worried about her marketing, John thought, and the new slip covers or drapes or something, and an appointment with her hairdresser, and how she could possibly get everything done before it would be time to come back for him at the beach. Momentous affairs, all these, particularly the appointment with the hairdresser. He wondered what was going on behind his wife's tanned and beautifully molded forehead, what color and style she was considering for her hair this time.

In ten months he had seen it change from its natural, and lovely, tawny color, to a hennaed cinnamon, then to dark red. Now it was blonde, so fair that it was almost white. He meditated, but not too deeply, on the apparently mysterious changeableness of women which, in truth, is not mysterious at all but motivated by an innate and universal dissatisfaction with themselves. Then he saw that they were approaching the Circle Bar (hot dogs, hamburgers, soft drinks, and beer) and he dismissed the subject from his mind.

The Circle Bar was on the right, at the junction of the Beach Road and a narrower road of hard-packed shell. The roadstand blocked all vision of the latter until they were actually on it, and Marla had swerved right without cutting down her speed.

"Some day," John said, "this circus van is going to wind up so much junk."

"Sorry. I keep telling myself to be careful at that corner. Then I get to thinking about something else . . ."

Marla drove the twenty yards which was the total length of the shell road and stopped before a sign that read *NO DOGS ALLOWED ON BEACH.* Beyond the sign was another stretch of twenty yards, this one of sloping sand, and beyond that the water of the Gulf. The beach was bounded on the left by a stony projecting finger known as the Point of Rocks. It had no boundary on the right for several miles. A few heads floated like coconuts in the water, and a few people were lying on the sand. A man walked by, holding in two muscular black poodles on a double leash. A dog of unspecified breed, unleashed, raced round and round them, barking. So much for signs, John thought. Marla got out, walked around the car, and opened the door at his side.

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"You go ahead. I'll bring the chair," she said.

"I can carry it."

"Probably, but there's no reason why you should."

John got out. First he pivoted on the seat until he had managed to worm his legs through the open door. Then, with the help of his rubber-tipped cane, he heaved himself upright. Fire smoldered in his hip. He looked away while Marla wrestled with the deck chair. He stumped forward when he heard the car door slam.

Marla passed him on the sand. By the time he reached his accustomed spot she had set up the chair. He let himself down gently, but the canvas chair was low and getting seated was always hazardous. He panted a little when finally he managed it.

"Got your book? Okay," Marla said. "Now what else will you need? Cigarettes? Coca Cola? Beer?"

"I don't need a thing."

"Nice day. Maybe I'll have a swim when I come back."

"The ocean'll be here. And so will I."

"Yes. Yes, I suppose that's true. See you." She walked back to the car. He took a paper-backed book from his pocket. One paragraph was all he could read. Then he snapped the book shut and put it away.

Two young women strolled by. They were pretty and had nice figures. He watched them, but without any twinge of desire. Gloomily, rather, because he knew that for them—and for their millions of sisters—he was no longer an object of interested speculation. He was washed up, through, a cripple. His mouth, which would have been a good mouth had it not been thinned by bitterness, opened and closed as he drew a sharp, unsatisfying breath. The air was clean, having the ozonic, healthy odor of weak chlorine; nevertheless he felt stifled.

"Hi," a young voice said from just beside him.

It was Luella, last name unknown, who lived, vaguely, "down the beach." With an aunt, John had gathered, whom he had never seen. Luella was eleven. Her scrawny body was more amply covered by a bathing suit designed for a girl a couple of years older and much plumper than herself. Two braids of neutral-colored hair hung down her back, and she had a sharply featured little face, brown eyes too knowing for her age, and grimy knees.

"Hello," he said.

"That your wife just left?"

He nodded.

She said, "Pretty," and added thoughtfully, "I guess. Where'd she go?"

"To the market, maybe into town to do some shopping, probably to the beauty parlor. Why?"

"I knew her hair was dyed."

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Luella plumped down on the sand. Her back to John, she chewed one of her braids, staring at a couple who lay between them and the water. There was a long silence before either of them spoke again.

Then Luella said rapidly, "They're not married. His wife's getting a divorce for non-support and desertion and uncompatibility—"

"*In*compatibility."

"Okay. She used to be a manicurist at Rex's barber shop but she doesn't have to work now because she lives with him."

With some difficulty John unraveled the breathlessly complex information. The girl, not the wife, had been a manicurist. "Do you know those people?"

"Not exactly."

"Then how on earth did you find out about them? And about half a dozen other people you've pointed out to me?"

Luella, it seemed, had become conveniently deaf.

"You're a menace," he said, half meaning it. "If you were my little girl I'd give you a good spanking."

The small head pivoted on the long thin neck. Luella's brown eyes looked sleepily into his and John experienced a sensation similar to a mild electric shock. Before he could analyze it, Luella had scrambled to her feet and started toward the water. At a distance of three yards she turned and walked backward for a moment, grinning. Then she ran up the beach, disappearing behind a clump of colored umbrellas.

Left alone, John tried again to read. He struggled through two pages before he put the book back in his pocket. After that he did nothing but wait for Marla and, from time to time, glance curiously at the couple (married? unmarried?) lying thirty feet away.

Marla arrived at noon, a full hour before her customary time. She wore a new and highly revealing swimming suit completely unsuited to her personality as John had always understood her personality. It occurred to him that, since his accident, she had changed. She no longer seemed to care especially for his opinion.

"There's your wife," Luella said. He had not realized she'd come back. "That's Shelby Granville with her."

John removed his dark glasses for a better view. Granville, with his black crew-cut and overly handsome face, was at Marla's side. He wore bathing trunks and waved to John as they approached.

Marla called, "Shelby had some trouble with his car. I gave him a lift."

"Good enough."

"Hello, old boy," Granville said, a form of address John disliked extremely. Beyond that, he really had nothing against the man. He was a mental lightweight, but amusing.

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"Hello," he said.

"I'm going for a swim." Marla kicked off her beach shoes. "The young lady a friend of yours?"

John was surprised to see that Luella's face had suddenly grown sullen. "Luella, this is Mrs. Carter and Mr. Granville."

"Hi, Shelby." She did not speak to Marla. So far as she was concerned, Marla wasn't there.

Granville nodded warily, and Luella muttered, "Gotta go now. Gotta go on home and get my lunch." She walked away.

Marla laughed. "A new facet to your already multifaceted character, Shelby?"

Granville shrugged. "I know her aunt slightly."

"Coming?" Marla adjusted a rubber cap. Followed by Granville, she ran to the water and waded in. She stood hip-deep for a time, getting used to the cooler temperature, and the receding waves plastered the wet suit to her body. Granville, who had dived in immediately, returned to speak to her. She laughed. He took her hand and guided her to deeper water. Then they struck out side by side, and the ebb tide carried them out of sight beyond the Point of Rocks.

They were gone for more than half an hour. John saw Luella again before they returned. She came from the direction in which Marla and Granville had disappeared.

"No lunch?"

"Nobody home. I ate an apple. Your wife's down there"—she pointed—"on the beach."

"Yes?"

"With Shelby."

"So?"

Luella suddenly giggled. She walked off in the direction of her home.

Shortly afterward, John saw Marla and Granville coming toward him. He tried to get up but couldn't make it. Marla had to help him from his chair.

They dropped Granville at the garage where his car was being fixed, and went home for lunch. After lunch Marla took her nap. Later she would go out again to finish the day's round of chores and John, if he did not go with her, would be left with a bitter choice between reading and television. He hated daytime television, but usually he preferred it to being a helpless passenger. When Marla had retired to her room, he limped out to sit on the end of the boat dock in the shade of an overhanging live oak.

The Carter home was on the edge of a natural canal between the Gulf and a small bay. They had a boat, its outboard motor covered by a tarpaulin; the boat had been unused now for months and was laid away in the carport against a more active time. Sitting there, John wondered why the motor had to be inactive, why

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he had allowed himself to drift into an inertia as complete as that of the motor. There were literally hundreds of things he could still do. He liked to fish. There was a wheelbarrow in the tool shed. Tomorrow he would trundle the motor down here, set it up in the boat, and go out with his tackle. There were also plenty of odd jobs to do around the house. The guard-rail on this boat dock needed strengthening. He had always been handy with tools, and it was merely a question of getting interested again. A change of attitude—no more than that. Tomorrow . . .

Marla came out of the house, a preoccupied expression on her face. "Is anything the matter, John?"

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"The way you act—like a sulky little boy. You make me feel as if I'd done something wrong."

"Have you?"

"Of course not. Coming into town?"

He shook his head. "Rather listen to TV. Good program coming up. Captain Alligator. It's about—"

"Do you have to be so bitter?"

"I'm not bitter. I just want to listen to Captain Alligator. Do you mind?"

He went to bed that night and decided that in the morning he would skip going to the beach. There were too many more constructive methods of killing time. But when he awoke it was to a familiar condition of lassitude. It tired him even to think of the exertion that would be necessary to install the outboard motor and take the boat down to the bay. He was ready at nine fifteen when, following their established schedule, Marla ran the car out in the drive.

Luella did not appear that morning, but the following day he had been on the beach only a few minutes when he saw her coming toward his chair.

"Hi."

"Hello, Luella. Where were you yesterday?"

She studied him gravely. "My aunt locked me in my room."

"Well, that's the price small girls have to pay for being naughty."

"I didn't mind. I had lots to think about. And I'll get even. Don't you worry," she said. "I'll get even."

John shifted his position uneasily. "See here, Luella. Your aunt must have had good reason to lock you up. What did you do?"

She didn't answer, and it occurred to John that this was her set pattern. Asked a question she preferred not to answer, she simply ignored it. A thoroughly exasperating trait.

"Shelby isn't here today," she said abruptly. "Was he here yesterday?"

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"I didn't see him."

There was a smudge on her left cheek. It twitched as she lifted that side of her face in a small grin. "You don't like him, do you? Your wife does. I bet—" She broke off. A piece of broken glass was at her feet. She picked it up, dropped it in a paper sack that she hauled from under her baggy swimming suit, and stowed the sack back in its hiding place.

"What do you bet?"

Again she didn't answer, but her grin persisted. It infuriated him. "Answer me, Luella! What were you going to say?"

She turned and strolled off down the beach.

Marla whipped into the shell road at the usual time. She helped him stand up, folded the deck chair, then took it to the car. They were both silent driving home and all through lunch. After lunch he rolled the wheelbarrow to the carport. Straining, he lifted the outboard motor. When he had it securely in the wheelbarrow, he had to stop and rest.

Marla came out while he was leaning against the red and white convertible. "What are you trying to do?"

"I'm not *trying* to do anything."

"Okay, sorry I used a dirty word. But if you want that motor in the boat, why don't you tell me? I'm always glad to give you a hand."

"I have the normal allotment of hands. Three would only complicate the job. And if it comes to that," he added sarcastically, "how much do *you* tell *me?*"

"About what?"

"Never mind." He lifted the handles of the wheelbarrow. By a series of lunges—push a step, set the barrow down, then push again—he got it to the dock. Marla watched from a distance but when he stopped beside the boat she went inside the house.

The boat lay upside down on top of the dock. He didn't have much trouble righting it and letting it down into the water. Getting the motor into place was harder. He could hardly lift it and when he did have it cradled against his chest, his hip gave way. He fell back against the guardrail. Wood cracked sharply as the flimsy rail gave way. He teetered for an instant on the dock's edge, then dropped the motor and sprawled out on the planks. Water splashed him as the motor struck it and sank from sight.

John sat on a makeshift bollard, shivering. He probably would not have drowned if he had fallen in. Somehow, for a time, he could have managed to keep afloat. But mangroves grew impenetrably on the banks of the canal and without help he would never have been able to climb back on the dock. If he had shouted, and if his shouts had gone unheeded or unheard . . .

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He studied the guard-rail. At the point where it had broken, the wood showed fresh. The break, except for an eighth of an inch or less, was clean. But there was a scattering of sawdust underneath it. He pushed himself upright, got his cane, and went unsteadily to the house.

Marla was in the living room. She had been watering some potted plants and had a pitcher in her hand. She dropped the pitcher when she saw his face. The pitcher broke, spilling water on the terrazzo floor.

"What happened, John?"

He closed the door and leaned against it. "Don't you know?"

"Would I ask you if I did?"

"Somebody," he said deliberately, "somebody sawed the dock's railing almost through. Somebody came damn close to killing me."

Marla's hand went swiftly to her throat. "Oh, my God!" she said. "I forgot to tell you!"

"Somebody neglected to tell me something. That's obvious."

She stepped gingerly over the spilled water. "I did it this morning. I've been intending to fix that rail for weeks—to saw it off and put a new one in. But I got started late. Before I could finish it was time to pick you up." She tried to kiss him. "I'm terribly sorry!"

He twisted his head away. "Sorry I didn't drown?"

She flushed. "You shouldn't say such things."

"You'd say such things and worse if you were in my place."

"Now that is something in which I'm interested." Her voice had suddenly become as cutting as his own. "What is your place exactly?"

"I'm not sure. Suppose you tell me."

"As far as I can see," she said, "your place is on the beach. Sitting. Or on the boat dock. Sitting. Or sitting beside me in the car. Not trying to help in any way. Just sitting and feeling sorry for yourself. You've been absolutely useless ever since that so-called injury to your hip!"

"So-called?"

"You know what the doctor told me? That hip is three-tenths bruise and seven-tenths psychosomatic condition. But you leave everything—for me to do!"

"Including sawing off the dock rail? Including planting an orange crate where I'd be sure to fall over it in the dark? Deliberately?"

She couldn't have been more shocked if he had slapped her. "You think I left that orange crate in the drive—deliberately?"

"I said so, didn't I?"

She squared her shoulders, standing very straight. "And if I did—just suppose what you suspect is true—what do you propose to do about it?"

"Protect myself, of course."

"I know this scene. It's the one where the wronged husband packs

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his bags and moves to his club. Unfortunately the Golf Club isn't equipped for permanent guests."

"I can go to a hotel."

"How will you get to town? You don't expect me to drive you, do you?"

"I wouldn't trust you to drive me. I'll call a cab."

She stepped aside. "There's the telephone."

He walked toward it, furious. His foot came down in the spilled water and he slipped. Sick pain flooded him as he landed on his bad hip on the slick terrazzo floor.

Marla got him into bed. He lay there for three days while his right leg performed odd little jerking movements with no direction from himself. He could tell when a spasm was coming. For a while, by grasping both sides of the mattress and exerting all the pressure he was capable of, he could stall it off. But eventually it came back anyway. His foot would kick straight up and try as he might, he could not restrain the accompanying groan of agony.

The doctor came the first day. "Frankly, I'm puzzled by that hip of yours," he said. "The x-rays show nothing seriously wrong with it. Why don't you forget your cane and try to walk?"

"Because I don't enjoy falling on my face."

On the second day Marla brought him a cup of chicken broth. It tasted bitter, unlike any broth he had ever known. He refused to drink it. Indeed, he refused all further food.

"But you must eat! If you're just trying to punish me—"

"I'm not punishing anyone. I'll be up tomorrow. Meanwhile, I'm not hungry."

But the following morning he was still unable to get out of bed. And Shelby Granville came calling in the afternoon.

"Let's have the truth, old boy. You nursing a hangover or just taking a little rest?" He had the spuriously boisterous manner which some people assume when they enter a sick-room. "You look all right to me."

"I am all right," John said. "And I don't have a hangover. Now it's your turn to tell the truth. Who told you I was laid up?"

Marla had followed Granville into the room. She stood on his left and John saw what he took to be an unspoken warning flash from her to their guest.

"Well—" Granville said, and hesitated. He seemed confused.

"Don't bother telling me. I think I know." John got that far before he stopped. He stopped because, in the circumstances, he was unable to put his suspicions into words. Not before a man who, whatever he meant to Marla, was to him an enemy.

"Time for John's nap, Shelby." Marla's tone was conciliatory.

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"Let's go into the living room. I'll give you a drink."

"I could use one." Granville backed to and through the door. "Carter, I want to see you hale and hearty next time I come around."

"I'll be hale, at least. That's a promise," John told him as Marla reached back and shut the soor.

There followed a bad ten minutes during which John threw back the sheets and forced himself to swing his legs out of the bed. His cane was handy. By leaning on it and holding on to the bedpost, he pulled himself to a standing position. It hurt but, unexpectedly, his leg behaved much better when he was on his feet. He worked down to the foot of the bed, supporting himself with one hand on the mattress. From there, with his cane, he snaked a straight-backed chair into the position he desired. It was the steady prop he had needed. Moving it forward a few inches at a time, he made his way to the closed door. He put his ear against it, listening.

Voices. Marla's voice and then Granville's, but either they were so muffled by the door, or purposely had been pitched so low, that he couldn't make out more than an occasional word. But it was hardly necessary to hear what they were saying. It was as though, in some previously neglected corner of his mind, he knew the burden of their whisperings, had known what they had talked about and plotted from the beginning. He inched back to bed.

He dozed a little that night, but there was no real sleep. And in the morning when Marla brought his breakfast, which he did not touch, he was already dressed.

"Well, this is a surprise," she said. "Glad to see you're feeling better, but you needn't have put your clothes on."

"As a matter of fact, that's exactly what I did need. The authorities take a dim view of people wearing pajamas on the beach."

"You're going to the beach?"

"I have to go somewhere. I can't lie here forever."

She hesitated, but only for a moment. "Maybe you know best."

This time when Marla raced the red and white convertible past the Circle Bar and into the short shell road, John sat tensely upright, fighting to control his jangled nerves. As usual, she hauled out the deck chair, and as usual she asked if he needed anything before she left. On the surface everything was as it had been before but, unknown to Marla, a radical change had entered their relationship. He had found her out. He was convinced she was trying to get rid of him. She had no money of her own and since she couldn't reasonably expect much alimony, she was going about it in the most elementary of all ways.

Two young women walked by.

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They were pretty and had nice figures. Perhaps they were the same two he had seen before. If so, he watched them this time for a different reason—enviously, because they were so alive. He watched them until they reached the Point of Rocks, then saw them turn and stroll back up the beach again. They walked along the water's edge, meeting Luella who came from the opposite direction. Luella climbed the beach toward him. Her paper sack had been replaced by a small canvas bag.

"Where you been?" She halted in front of him, shifting her weight from one foot to the other. Her eyelids were half lowered with a new secretiveness.

"Hello," he said.

"Where you been?"

"At home. Do something for me, will you, Luella?"

"Depends."

"Get me a hamburger and a carton of black coffee. No sugar." He gave her a dollar. "Get something for yourself," he added when she did not move.

She nodded and walked toward the Circle Bar.

The two young women had stretched out on the sand. They lay close together, talking confidentially, and an aura of feminine mystery surrounded them. Presently they got up and waded into the sea.

"Here's your stuff." Luella had come back.

"Thanks. Where's yours?"

She squatted and laid her canvas bag on a flat rock. With another rock she pounded on the bag. There was a sound of breaking glass. "I'll save the money. Got a lot of money saved up now."

"That's nice. Saving for anything in particular?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" She pounded on her bag. Her next question came abruptly. "Where's your wife?"

"Home."

"She was here yesterday. So was Shelby," she added, after a pause.

He changed the subject, irritably. "Luella, what are you doing with that bag?"

"Smashing up this glass. It's for my pictures. I make real pretty pictures." She answered unemotionally but, for the first time in all the weeks he had known her, he caught a glint of enthusiasm in the thin, small face. "Got the walls of my room almost covered. You smear paint on first—any kind of paint just so it's sticky. Then you draw a picture with your finger. Then you get the glass all powdery and blow it on the picture with a bellows. Makes it glitter," she said. "What you sweating so much for?"

"It's very hot."

"Don't feel hot to me." She kept pounding with her rock.

He leaned forward, perspiration rolling down his face. "Tell you what," he said. "I'll give you a dol-

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lar for that bag. How about it?"

She looked up slowly, amusement in her half closed eyes. "You want this glass? What for?"

"Never mind. Here's the dollar."

"Well—"

He gave her a bill. She examined it carefully, then lifted the canvas bag with both hands, in a sort of ritual gesture. He put the bag in his pocket. She got up and slowly walked toward the water. No further word was spoken but at a distance of several yards she glanced back over her shoulder. Then she giggled, disconcertingly.

Marla had to choose that particular day to have what she called a heart-to-heart talk. He sat at the table while she prepared lunch, and the sugar bowl was in front of him. Marla used lots of sugar. She did not have to worry about her weight.

She said, "We can't go on like this. Do you realize you've hardly spoken a word to me for days?" She paused, then went on. "What's happened to us? We were so happy until you had that accident. The doctor says that all you need is exercise."

"Doctors!"

"You pay their bills. It seems to me you'd listen to what they say."

Talk, talk, talk. She was in and out of the kitchen, but never out long enough for him to open the sugar bowl and do what he planned to do. The suspense was torture. By the time they finished lunch John was exhausted and had to lie down on his bed. And that afternoon Marla varied her routine. She stayed at home until four thirty and then went out for only twenty minutes to get a carton of cigarettes.

Before dinner he was similarly blocked from unobserved access to the sugar bowl, and he got no sleep the first part of the night. He struggled up shortly after midnight. Taking his flashlight he went quietly to the kitchen, found the bowl, and emptied about half of the canvas bag into it. Then he returned to bed and slept soundly the balance of the night.

But in the morning, when Marla brought him orange juice, he sat up quickly. "I'll eat at the table." He fumbled for his cane. "Have you had breakfast?"

"Just some juice."

"No coffee? No cereal?"

"Not yet. Why don't you have breakfast here? It's just as easy—"

"I'll eat at the table!" he repeated loudly, and squirmed into his bathrobe. Marla was in the kitchen when he took his usual place. She brought in two cups of steaming coffee.

"None for me," he said.

She started to protest, then shrugged. She picked up the sugar to sweeten her own coffee. The bowl dropped to the floor and smashed.

"Clumsy!" she said. "Darn thing slipped out of my hand." She got

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a whiskbroom and a dustpan and swept up the sugar. John muttered inarticulately when she finally sat down.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

Nothing, he thought—there was nothing to be done. Fatalistically, he accepted the fact that he was going to die. It was really all right: in such circumstances he didn't want to live. For the first time in days he ate a hearty breakfast. Afterward, the expected pain and nausea failed to materialize. He was almost relaxed when Marla drove him to the beach.

There were more people on the sand that morning—strangers for the most part, the vanguard of the tourist season. He did not see Luella until three-quarters of an hour before it was time for Marla to pick him up, and he would not have seen her then if a woman lying nearby on a blanket had not suddenly rolled over. Luella was sitting just beyond her. She waved, jumped up, and ran to his chair.

"Hello," he said. "You're not collecting glass this morning? No more pretty pictures?"

She shook her head disdainfully. "I got better things to do. "How's your wife?"

"Mrs. Carter is quite well."

"She was here yesterday afternoon."

"Was she?"

"Yeah. Her and Shelby."

He felt suddenly depleted, knowing that he wanted no more of this child. He needed a drink, but there was no bar or package store in walking distance. The Circle Bar sold beer, if he could get there. He tried as Luella watched him, not offering to help. He put one hand on the wooden bar that formed the front part of the deck chair, planted his cane in the sand, and pushed. Then surprisingly he was standing up, unsteadily but in a position from which he could go on to the next step. He was turning toward the shell road when a flash of memory brought him to a stop.

Marla had stayed at home most of the previous afternoon. She had gone out at four thirty, of course, and she could have come here to the beach at that time—but she hadn't been gone for more than twenty minutes. He looked at Luella. She was still watching him, her face expressionless. He turned back to ask her what time Marla had been here yesterday.

He didn't get a chance. Seeing him stop, Luella spoke again. "They were here a couple of hours. Behind the Point of Rocks."

He didn't tell her that he knew she lied. But she must have sensed it. "You don't believe me? Ask anybody! She shows up every day with Shelby!"

He left her, limping to the shell road and making his painful way to the Circle Bar. He drank two cans of beer. They had no effect on

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him. He returned to his chair and caught sight of the picture while he was still several yards away.

It lay on the seat, a rectangle of cardboard covered with sticky paint from which shards of glass reflected the strong sunlight. Wondering, he picked it up. His breath stopped for a moment when he realized what he was holding. A crude, finger-drawn picture of a man and woman. Even in his disgust he could not help admiring Luella's talent. There could be no mistaking the two people she had meant to portray, nor the suggestive manner in which she had meant to portray them.

He dropped the glob of paint and turned to face the sea. She was squatting on a slight elevation just beyond a group of men.

"Luella!" he called, but she paid no attention. He had to shout. "Come here!"

She got up, but did not approach him immediately. She stopped first to speak to the men. There were three of them. They rolled over on their stomachs to look at John. Then Luella strutted toward him. Strut was the only word for her complacent little swagger. She stopped with one hand on her hip, posing like a grotesque midget-model.

"Whatcha want?"

He pointed to the picture with his cane. "Is that thing yours?"

She nodded. "Think it's pretty?"

"Go away," he said. "I don't want you ever to speak to me again."

"Say—" She pulled herself up straight, offended. "You better watch out. I know about men like you." She came a half step nearer, undulating her thin body. "I bet you'd like to kiss me, wouldn't you?"

"Get away from me!"

Luella giggled. She skipped back out of reaching distance before she let the giggle turn into a sharp scream. She ran to the three men and whispered urgently to them. All three got up and stared at John. Other people were looking at him too—curiously. One of the men walked over to a neighboring group. The group's curiosity changed suddenly to loathing. They, too, got to their feet, all staring fixedly at John. There were seven of them now. They started walking toward him. They plodded through the sand, their arms swinging slightly ahead of them. They walked, he thought, like apes.

He called out, "Now wait a minute—" But they did not stop. They were no more than six yards away when he started backing up. "Now wait—" They kept on coming. Luella trailed behind. The instant before he broke and tried to run, he saw her eyes. They were excited, and her mouth was open wide.

His cane sank deep into the sand. It was now a hindrance more

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than a help. On the shell road he was able to go faster but when they noticed his increased speed, they also spurted forward and two of them came up to walk abreast of him, one on either side.

"Where you think you're going, Jack?" the man on the left asked.

"Now listen—"

"You son of a—" growled the one on the right. "We ought to turn you over to the cops."

"Hell with the cops," said the other. "We'll handle it ourselves."

The two men started closing in.

Marla, he thought, instinctively identifying her with sanctuary. There was a telephone at the Circle Bar. If he could only reach it—

"Let's get him!" someone shouted from behind. There was a growing murmur of agreement.

John broke into a panicked run. After the first few steps he dropped his cane, abandoned it, and kept on. He hadn't known that he could walk without it, but he was making good time now. The Circle Bar was on his left, ahead. He had almost reached it when his hip, unused to the exercise, gave way. He fell, sprawled out in the middle of the shell road as the red and white convertible raced around the corner. He caught a single glimpse of Marla's face through the windshield. The convertible was going fifty miles an hour when it hit him.

Marla screamed at the initial impact. She slammed on the brakes, skidded to a stop.

The man beside her nodded his approval. "Quick thinking, baby. Keep it up. We'll climb out now and you start throwing hysterics. Understand?"

"Of course." The words were spoken in a controlled voice at singular variance with the piercing screams.

"Let's go, baby," Shelby Granville said.

Coming soon . . .

Jack London's Adventure Magazine, an exciting new companion for EQMM, will make its appearance on the newsstands soon. It will be brought out by Davis Publications, Inc., the publishers of EQMM, and its format will be the same as EQMM's—only the best stories in its field, both new and old. The first issue, for example, will have fine new adventure stories by such authors as James M. Cain, J. C. Furnas, and Garland Roark, as well as special finds from the past by Ernest Hemingway, C. S. Forester, Roald Dahl, Jack London, and others. See next month's EQMM for the full announcement . . . and don't miss the first issue!

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CHARLES GREEN**

TITLE: ***A Mouse Called Emily***

TYPE: Suspense Story

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Do you have a fondness for those curious, offbeat conversations that sometimes happen at a bar? Well, this one sure was bizarre!*

SO I WAS STANDING AT THE BAR, just kind of doodling in my mind, when the man next to me announced that he guessed he'd go home and see what Emily was up to. I glanced around. He was looking at me. And smiling. A middle-aged, plump little man. Mild blue eyes, friendly and blinking behind rimless glasses. An old-fashioned stiff collar pinching off a round, pink-jowled face. The kind of a meek little guy you'd expect to see clutching an umbrella.

"Emily is a mouse," he explained brightly. "Don't know *why* I called her Emily. But she's been in my apartment quite a long time now. *Quite* a long time, sir. I'd like to tell you about her. By the way, my name is Edwin Hoffman. I'm a bookkeeper. Work for Halpert and Brown. A dress house. Splendid people to work for, too."

He paused, his head cocked to one side, evidently waiting for data on me. Against my better judgment, I told him my name was Farrell, and he immediately insisted on shaking hands. Yes, apparently it was going to be one of *those* things. A garrulous bore.

It was rather unpleasant, I learned, to shake hands with Mr. Edwin Hoffman. His palm was moist, clammy, and somehow you couldn't feel the bones in his pudgy little hand. Just to say something, since this little screwball was standing there beaming at me, I told him that I, too, once owned a pet mouse.

"Oh, Emily isn't a *pet* mouse," he said. "Good Heavens, no! Far from it, Mr. Farrell. She just

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moved into my apartment one day, and at first I didn't mind, but after a while I became quite *unhappy* about Emily. You see, sir, I've always lived alone. I enjoy living alone. Emily is terribly—well, distracting. She scratches. Practically all the time, you can hear her scratch, scratch, scratch. And she squeaks, too. Come to think of it, I don't know which is more maddening, her scratching or her squeaking."

I could swear that he wasn't drunk.

"What's wrong," I said, "with permanently stopping Emily's scratching and squeaking? There are certain efficient gadgets made for that purpose, you know."

You could see that he was just delighted to explain. "Oh, I know all about *them*," he replied with an amused flutter of his hands. "Right this moment, sir, I've *many* traps in my apartment. All different kinds. But I haven't *set* them yet, you see. I don't want Emily to have the least suspicion that they *are* traps. So I've been putting food where you're supposed to bait the traps. And she's been eating it. Yes, Emily has been getting fat eating the food right off—well, you might say right off the bait hooks. Of course, they aren't really *hooks*."

I glanced around to check how the other people were taking this. There were only two other men at the bar of that dingy Third Avenue bar. One was making a crystal ball of his glass of beer, and obviously didn't like what he was seeing in it. The other man, farther over, was a more optimistic and energetic crystal gazer; he was in a huddle with a racing form. And the baldheaded bartender had his nose in a newspaper. I might have been alone with Mr. Edwin Hoffman.

"Look, if it's a gag, I don't get it," I said. "Why haven't you set those traps?"

He looked surprised. "The reason is obvious, I should think. The first time that Emily saw a trap she'd be wary, wouldn't she? Be cautious about taking the bait. Well, supposing she sprung the trap—and it *didn't* get her? Which, you must admit, does happen sometimes. I know that Emily is quite clever. Once her suspicions were aroused, once she found out that I was determined to get rid of her—well, it'd be much more difficult then, wouldn't it? But, Mr. Farrell, the time is drawing near."

"To set the traps?"

"Yes. Maybe I'll do it tonight. Or tomorrow night. Or possibly next week. Now Emily is used to the traps. Thinks nothing of them. She'll take the bait confidently. And then it'll happen. Bang!" He brought the side of his hand down on the bar. "So! Down will come the spring. And I'll be rid of Emily forever. Won't I, Mr. Farrell?"

"Yes, I guess you would."

"But perhaps I won't use the

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spring traps," he went on, a moist glitter now in his eyes. "I've got those others, too, you know. The cages with the trap doors. Once Emily is squeaking helplessly inside of one, I could attach a string to it, and then I'd fill the bathtub and lower the cage with Emily inside right down into the tub." His arm went up, descended slowly, went up again. "Ah, Emily is still wriggling a bit, is she? Very well, we'll just submerge her again. So! . . . And then, of course, Mr. Farrell, there's always poison, eh? We mustn't forget *that*. I've made quite a study of—"

I jerked up from the bar stool, and he backed away a bit, his eyes puzzled as he peered at me through his glasses.

"Why, what's wrong, Mr. Farrell?"

I said, "I think I've heard just about all I want to hear about Emily."

He smiled, then nodded. "Yes, I do get to be a bit of a bore when I start talking about Emily. Well, I've got to be running along. Good night, Mr. Farrell."

He nodded again and walked out. I pushed aside my glass of beer and ordered whiskey. When the bartender served it, I asked him if he knew the little guy who'd just left.

"No," he replied. "Like you, it's his first time here. What were you two talking about? A mouse?"

"Yes, a mouse called Emily."

"My nephew's got some white mice," the bartender said. "They stink."

After that succinct contribution he went back to his newspaper.

I couldn't get it out of my mind. It was easy enough to play amateur psychiatrist and figure out what was motivating Edwin Hoffman. He had a streak of sadism in him. He delayed killing the mouse because, once it was dead, the anticipatory thrill of killing it would be gone. Got a perverted kick out of talking about it. I would have let it go at that—if it weren't for just one thing that he had said. The business about *filling* a bathtub in order to drown the trapped mouse in the cage.

Maybe my reasoning was screwy, but it seemed to me that Hoffman should not have had the mental image of a *bathtub*. Not for a little thing like a mouse. A bucket, yes. Wouldn't one almost automatically be guided by the cliché of drowning like a rat in a bucket? Perhaps not. Perhaps Hoffman didn't own a bucket. All right, so he saw a bathtub—and now let's drop it, for God's sake!

I made the mistake of trying to anesthetize with more drinks the memory of that Charles Addams version of Walter Mitty. It had, of course, just the opposite effect. After a while, I found myself looking him up in the phone book. Yes, there was an Edwin Hoffman listed. Two-hundred block on East

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Thirty-eighth Street. Maybe a three-minute walk from here.

I was angry with myself when I returned to the bar. And determined to stop behaving like a fool. I was going to finish my drink, go home, and forget about it. But the bartender decided that it was time for me to get a drink on the house. And there's a certain delicate point of ethics that prohibits you from leaving after getting a free drink. So I had another Bourbon and soda.

And that was why, when I walked out of the place, I turned right instead of left. Two blocks north to Thirty-eighth Street, a half block east—and there was the trim little apartment building where Hoffman lived. I rang his bell, and there was a buzzing sound in the lock of the vestibule door. I went up to the third floor in the self-service elevator without the faintest idea of what I would do or say when Hoffman opened the door.

Edwin Hoffman did not open his door when I rang the apartment bell. A woman did. A plump, powdery woman, with an aging little-girl face.

"Mrs. Thompson?" I said, remembering one of the names on the bells in the vestibule.

From farther back in the apartment, Hoffman's voice called out, "Who is it, Emily?"

"Just someone who has the wrong apartment, dear," the woman said. And added to me, "The Thompsons live on the floor below."

There *was* a squeak in her voice. She shut the door, and I was glad that the cage of the self-service elevator was still on that landing . . .

Well, I've been watching the papers. Nothing has happened yet. And nothing probably will happen. Hoffman just liked to think about it, to talk about it. He'd never have the nerve to do it. Just the same, I've been watching the papers.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ALAN E. NOURSE**

TITLE: ***Doors in the Mind***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Dr. Ned Thompson

LOCALE: St. Christopher's Hospital

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *About one of the most horrifying dangers that nurses and doctors have to fight in a modern hospital—a cruel, vicious, almost unbelievable menace . . .*

IN MEDICINE," SAID DR. NED THOMPson, pouring his fourth cup of coffee for the evening, "there are no absolutes. There are light grays and dark grays, and mauve pinks and lime greens until you want to scream, but just try to find a rich jet black, or a good pure white. You can spend your life looking, but you'll never find it." He stirred in cream and sugar and glared across the table at Betty Gibson, the little blonde evening supervisor.

"Now what's wrong?" asked Gibby. "Patient bite you?"

"A medicine bit me," said the intern, looking at her strangely. His white jacket was mussed and soiled from two days use; the curved ends of a weary stethoscope drooped from a slightly torn side pocket. "It just makes me tired, that's all. Here we have three hundred thousand men in medicine trying to find just one piddling answer that adds up the same way twice—*any* answer—and they can't even count on their tools to be the same from one hour to the next." He sipped coffee and hunched his long shoulders over the table. "Now take pain-relieving drugs, for instance. You use Demerol, or Dilaudid, or Pantapon, or Levo-Dromeran, or codeine, and you don't expect too much. You're sending a boy to do

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a man's work, and if the job only gets half done, you can't complain. But when you've got *real* pain to deal with, you send a man and not a boy. And there are very few kinds of pain that a dose of the poppy won't take care of." He sat back. "At least, I thought so until now."

The evening nurse was suddenly watching her coffee very carefully, and not looking at the intern at all. They were alone in the dimly lit basement dining room of the hospital, the tiny pink-cheeked nurse and the tall, loose-jointed intern, and they knew each other far too well by now for embarrassing silences. But for a moment the silence was embarrassing. Then Gibby said, "What are you trying to say?"

"I'm trying to say that old Mr. Canlee on Fourth only got a half an hour's relief from his morphine shot tonight," said Dr. Ned Thompson. "A sixth of a grain always lasted him four or five hours—until now. Tonight it didn't hold him for an hour." He set his cup down with finality. "I don't know how you figure it, but to me it adds up to something very fishy."

Gibby nodded. "I know," she said.

"Others, too?"

"Yes."

"A week, more or less." The girl shook her head unhappily. "I couldn't be sure until the last couple of nights, but there can't be much doubt any more."

The intern stared at her. "Do you know who it is?"

"It's Davis, obviously. She has the medications on Fourth floor, three o'clock to eleven. There's no one else it could be."

"Well, don't we have any cops in this town? My God, girl, what are you waiting for?"

"Proof," said Gibby. "It isn't enough to know it, not with this. You've got to prove it. But just try to prove it, and see how far you get."

For a moment the intern just blinked at her, shaking his head. But he knew she was perfectly right.

It was a vicious thing to have to prove.

It was a horrible, frightening thing. It happened so rarely as to be unimaginable—yet every hospital had seen it at one time or another. St. Christopher's Hospital was not the first, nor the last.

And when it happened, it was unbelievable, and sickening.

How and when it would start nobody knew. Nurses are close to sickness and death; pain is the enemy, healing the goat. The drugs and medications for relief of pain are part of the nurse's daily work, and she knows them well. But who could tell what pain the nurses suffered, too? To some of them, nursing is merely a job to

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be endured; to others it is a way of life, a glorification. But to a few it is a day's work to be dreaded, an emptiness and a loneliness with nothing for fulfillment. A healthy mind would find a healthy answer—adjust to the way of life and find contentment, or leave the profession. But on rare occasions an unhealthy mind would find a different kind of fulfillment . . .

She would come to the hospital as an experienced medications nurse. She would probably not be, but she would be efficient, would know her job. A confident voice, an aura of solid reliability—not like the giddy senior students about to graduate. References? Perhaps—but the hospitals she names so firmly are good hospitals, and with nurses *so* badly needed these days—

She might not start as a medications nurse, but she would soon end up there, or her interest in the job would quickly fade and she would be gone—to another hospital. A week after she was hired, you would find her, quietly and efficiently dispensing medications on the surgical floor, or perhaps on a medical floor caring for patients with heart disease or cancer or gall bladder trouble. She would be working the shift from three in the afternoon until eleven at night—so obliging of her to fill in on the shift the younger girls find so unpopular, not to mention that this is the shift when the morning's new surgical patients are recovering from their analgesics and hypnotics, and feeling the first bite of postsurgical pain—the shift when much narcotic is used, often freely used. And her narcotics-check with the evening supervisor before she went off duty each night would always be scrupulously accurate . . .

But presently, insidiously, the complaints would begin. Mr. Thornton's leg must be bothering him again—he needed two hypos between six and nine this evening before he got relief. And Mrs. Findley, complaining that her hypos aren't relieving her the least bit (although one has been tempted to think that nothing short of a tap with a sledge hammer would effectively silence Mrs. Findley for more than half an hour at a stretch). But Mrs. Conway, always so quiet, now hesitantly and almost apologetically asking for just a tiny hypo before she goes to sleep tonight—her back has been acting up something terrible this afternoon, for some reason—

Once or twice it could be ignored. All patients had different needs, different pain thresholds. A cry-baby with an appendectomy might demand more narcotic than a stolid old trooper with massive cancer resection. But gradually the trend would appear, and the evening supervisor (who has been

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through this mill before, painfully and wearily, somewhere, sometime) knows without any possibility of doubt that a nurse drug addict is at work in the hospital.

"Davis!" said Dr. Ned Thompson. "You mean Jane Davis? The little brown-haired girl that started on Fourth last month?"

"That's the one."

"I'd never have thought it."

Gibby grimaced. "Nobody ever does. She seems so—well, colorless. She's never been particularly friendly with any of the girls, no gossiping about the doctors or the patients. She just keeps to herself most of the time, as quiet as can be. And now this."

"Have you talked to Benedict down in the office about it?"

"Yes."

"Why doesn't he fire her"

"Because I talked him out of it," Gibby snapped, suddenly angry. "I *begged* him not to fire her. That won't solve the problem. She'll just go on to another hospital, get the same job there, do the same thing there. And then what about us? How do we know we aren't hiring another one to take her place?" She shook her blonde head emphatically. "Fire her, and you just turn her loose. This kind of person is horrible and cruel and you have to *catch* her to stop her, don't you see? You have to *actually catch her* in the act of stealing the stuff, catch her giving it to herself, in order to stop her. *Then* you can do something—you can charge her and prosecute her and put her away somewhere."

The girl took a deep breath and stamped out her cigarette. "But if you get excited and accuse her without proof—oh, brother! That's what she's waiting for. It's the worst possible charge. A hundred thousand dollar suit against the hospital for slander and defamation of character, her choice of the slickest lawyers in town to help her win it—she'd love that! She'd win it, too. And a hundred thousand dollars would buy her an awful lot of morphine."

"You really hate her, don't you?"

"You bet I do," said Gibby. "Wouldn't you if you were a nurse?"

"So what are you going to do?"

"Watch her. Mr. Benedict said he'd hold off for a few days. If we could catch her before the end of the week, he'd sit on my report without any action until then. But if we're still sure then and can't prove it—" she shrugged. "He can't do any more than that. The hospital can't afford to keep her."

"All right," said Ned Thompson, grimly. He poured more coffee, and stared up wearily at the clock. "If you're going to nail her in that time, you're going to need some help. You've got it."

She was small, and wiry, and

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tied her brown hair into a bun on the back of her neck—which did nothing whatever to enhance her beauty. As Ned Thompson blinked at her across the nursing station he realized that he had simply never noticed her before. He had known she was there, he had seen her a dozen times—in the corridors, in the medications alcove, in the chart room. But there had been nothing about her to draw his active attention. She seemed deliberately a trifle dowdy, a quiet brown blob of nothing, standing at the counter, arranging medications in little cups on a tray. Three small syringes lay on the tray also, prepared for use, with little pledgets of alcohol sponge around the needles.

Jane Davis. A name as devoid of sparkle as the girl herself. Thirty-five years old, she looked forty-five. With a little care, Ned reflected, she could have looked twenty-five.

His eyes slid down to her arms, and looked quickly away. She wore a long-sleeved sweater of white wool, tight at the wrists. Nothing would be learned from her arms. She gave him a vacant smile as she moved out into the corridor with her tray. His smile was a barely concealed grimace.

Watch her, Gibby had said, and they had planned how to divide the job. Now he realized how impossible the plan would be to carry out. Fourth floor was mixed medical and surgical, but he had patients and obligations on all five floors of the hospital. Gibby had five floors of nurses to supervise. Even when he was on Fourth and free to watch, there were limitations. He could hardly walk into the nurses' lounge. He couldn't follow the woman into every room. He couldn't be sure when a patient was to have a hypo, and then be there to see it given. He couldn't even be sure that any hypo he happened to see given by her actually contained the narcotic in the amount that was charted.

He knew only one thing for certain: somewhere on her person she carried a small vial with a rubber stopper. Some of the narcotic ordered for some of the patients went into that vial, the patient receiving only a half or a third of the dose ordered. Sometimes all the medication went into the vial, with the patient receiving sterile water of saline in substitution. But the chart would say *M.S. gr.* ⅙ or perhaps *Demerol 100 mg.* or *Dilaudid gr.* ⅓, *given per hypo, 3:40* P.M.

Search her handbag or her pockets? Gibby was very hesitant. She could try, if the opportunity presented itself. But it would have to be done with the utmost caution. Give the woman the faintest hint that she was being watched, and the game was over. Miss Davis would become ill, miss a day or two, perhaps come back for a day,

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and then express her regrets to the hospital and leave for good.

"That's why we can't alert the whole staff on the floor," Gibby had said. "Only you and I and Mr. Benedict know. We mustn't let anybody else know."

"What about the other interns?" Ned Thompson said. "Endicott spends a lot of time on Fourth. And Fischer could keep an eye on her."

Gibby shook her head. "She'd get on to it too soon. She'd know she was being watched from the first day. Ned, this girl has been through this time after time. She knows all the tricks, believe me. I just hope she doesn't know too many that I don't know—"

Endicott was not told, and neither was Fischer. Ned had finished his rounds on Third and Fifth by noon, saw three new patients after lunch, and completed rounds on Fourth just at 3:00 when the shift of nurses changed.

Now he placed the chart he was writing back in the rack and walked down the corridor toward the surgical Solarium at the end of the wing. Davis was there, passing out medications. She didn't even look at him. He stopped to talk to Mrs. Cartwright with the gall bladder, a large lady snoring in the corner bed. He checked her heart rate and examined her eyes and fingernails, and inquired about the itching that had bothered her. He wrote for a repeat serum bilirubin to be done in the morning, and added a homeopathic fraction to Mrs. Cartwright's bedtime sedative dose ("I haven't slept a wink for the last three nights, Doctor," she complained, and he valiantly resisted the impulse to suggest that if she slept less during the daytime she would sleep more at night.) He checked Mrs. Cartwright very carefully, but his eyes never left Jane Davis.

And he saw nothing. Mrs. Barnes, back from surgery that morning, had received her first hypo. Ned made a mental note to check back in an hour and see how it was holding. But he knew he probably wouldn't be able to if things suddenly got busy.

At the other end of the hall he stopped to see Mr. Wilcox, a routine visit with a conversation so well rehearsed that Ned could repeat it in his sleep.

"About time you got up here," Mr. Wilcox roared. "I tell you, Doc, I ain't staying in this bed another minute, so help me if I drop dead! Damn' foolishness, lying around here running up a bill." He beat hammy paws on a massive girth of chest. Mr. Wilcox's coronary regimen did not agree with him, and never had since the night he was brought to the hospital, gray-faced and shocky, closer to death than he had ever dreamed he would venture. He had been cajoled, reasoned with, and browbeaten into

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complete bed rest for thirty days, but he had fought every inch of the way. "I tell you, if you don't let me up today I'm going to pile out of bed and run the hundred yard dash up the hall."

Dr. Thompson grinned. "You might make it up there, but you'd never make it back. Why not relax and enjoy it?"

"Relax! So help me, Doc, I haven't moved a finger in two weeks!"

"Fine! You're an awful liar, George, but fine! Maybe if the boss okays it we'll let you up in a chair this week."

George Wilcox's florid face was suddenly serious. "No kidding, Doc, is everything really going all right?"

"We sure hope so. Looks like par for the course."

"The cardiogram was all right?"

"It showed changes—the right kind, this time. Let's keep it that way."

Ned grinned and pushed out into the corridor. Back in the nursing station, Davis was returning again with her tray. Three new patients had arrived for him to see, two of them admitted for complete diagnostic workups. He sighed, and turned to the new charts. If only he could take her by the collar, turn her upside down, and shake that little vial out—

But he couldn't. He glared at her back and headed down the hall to see the first new patient.

He found Gibby on Second an hour or so later and said, "Let me see your keys."

"What for?"

"I'd like a look at the narcotics drawer."

Gibby found the tiny master key on her ring, and pulled open a large drawer in the medications alcove. "It isn't just narcotics—we keep our emergency box in here, as well as all of our injection-type medications. Keeps them all under the control of a single nurse so she knows what's where, and what should be stocked. Take a look."

He had seen the drawer open before, of course, but had never paid much attention to it. In a busy hospital the intern's job was to decide when a sixth grain of morphine sulphate was to be given to a patient, and how often, and to write the order on the patient's chart accordingly. It was the responsibility of the medications nurse to see that it was given. He had never, he reflected, even seen many of the medications he had ordered during his internship months. Now he lifted the narcotics tray out of the drawer, blinking at the tubes and ampules critically.

There were the long, thin, pencil-like glass tubes with red-lettered labels saying *MORPHINE SULPHATE GR* ⅙ or *GR* ¼. Inside

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the tubes the tiny dead-white tablets were lined up in a row. A box marked *DEMEROL (100 MG)* contained a dozen or more clear glass ampules, heat-sealed at the top, with the drug name imprinted in blue ink on the outside of each ampule. Here the drug was already in solution, quite colorless, like a cc or two of water.

"I thought Demerol came in tablets," Ned grunted.

"It does, for oral use. This is for injection."

"Is this more of it?" He picked another ampule from the drawer. "I guess not. The name's different."

"You're getting into the emergency box now. That's Coramine, a heart stimulant. And here's adrenalin, and nor-adrenalin, and Mecholyl. And those tabs in the narcotics tray are Dilaudid, and that's Pantapon—"

He examined each tube carefully. "What do you do with the M.S. in tablets—dissolve it in a spoon?"

"Sometimes. Usually it's a lot easier to pop the tablet into a clean syringe and draw up a cc of water on top of it. It dissolves pretty quickly."

Ned nodded. "And suppose you were to give 50 mg. of Demerol instead of 100? You can't leave half the dose in the ampule and use it again, can you?"

"No, of course not. The other half is discarded."

Dr. Thompson raised his eyebrows.

"Oh, that's perfectly legitimate. It's just recorded as 'wasted'."

"Yeah, that's nice. How much has been 'wasted' on Fourth in the past week or so?"

"Some—but very little. Certainly not enough to supply—" She glanced aside and shrugged.

"And you actually *count* all this stuff with the medications nurse at the end of a shift?"

"After every shift. Every tablet and tube, three times a day, including Christmas."

"Supposing the nurse can't account for some?"

Gibby shook her head grimly. "She can. If she can't, we hunt for what's missing until she can. If we just can't find it anywhere, it's reported to the nursing office, and a report is filed with the Federal Narcotics Bureau, and that medications nurse isn't on medications any more. Period. We haven't had any missing on the report since that idiot Lesswing got married."

"Which just goes to prove that all that glitters is not gold," said Ned Thompson.

"Wrong proverb, but right idea," said Gibby. "Any luck at all yet?"

"Not a bit."

"Well—" She snapped the drawer closed and locked it carefully. "I guess we just keep trying."

By five o'clock he was weary

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enough to welcome the early hospital supper. He had the duty to look forward to, covering all medical patients in the house, so he strolled down to the intern's quarters, waved Endicott off en route to a dinner date, and sprawled on the sofa in the lounge in hopes of catching an hour's sleep before the evening rush began. After three calls about one patient and one call apiece about three others in the next half hour, he gave up in disgust. He rang the operator and "checked out" for ten minutes—his usual dodge to insure a few moments without interruption—and took a quick shower and shave. A clean shirt and a change of uniform cheered him somewhat. Ten minutes later he was stepping off the elevator on Fourth.

The floor seemed quiet. Miss Allison, the little gray-haired, birdlike charge nurse, was churning with activity at the desk ("That woman," Dr. Endicott had once said in his soft southern drawl, "can work harder to get less done than any other woman I ever knew"). She greeted him with her usual effusiveness. "Oh, Dr. Thompson, I'm so glad you came up. I was just about to page you—"

"I felt sure you were, Allison," said Ned. "I could feel it in my bones. I said to myself, 'You might just as well go up there now, because you're going to be called in five minutes anyway—'"

Allison blinked at him for a moment. "Well, *I* think somebody ought to go see Mrs. Conway. She's been lying there *suffering* since five o'clock, poor soul."

"Oh? What's on her order sheet?"

Allison handed him a chart. "You know, Dr. Morton was in and put her on half a grain every two hours if she needed it—but *I* think she needs more. Half a grain just doesn't hold her—"

"Half a grain of what?" Ned broke in.

"M.S."

"And that doesn't hold her?"

"It certainly does not! She had a hypo not twenty minutes ago—"

Ned was already halfway down the hall. Mrs. Conway was a favorite of his—an old friend, in a way. He had seen her first during her initial admission for surgery months before; since then she had been back five times. This was her final admission to St. Christopher's Hospital. She knew it, and Dr. Thompson knew it. She had been failing rapidly in recent weeks, still Ned was shocked when he saw her. She seemed to have grown more gaunt and shriveled in just the past day; her thin sallow face was a rigid grimace when she tried to smile at him, and she gripped his hand as he stopped by the bedside.

"Little trouble tonight, Margaret?"

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She shook her head weakly. "I just don't know what's wrong with me. You know, I was doing so *well* yesterday. And now every time I move a muscle—Dr. Thompson, isn't there anything you can do? I've tried to fight it, you know I have, but when it breaks loose like this—" She turned her face away. "I don't think I can take it much longer."

"Did that last hypo help?"

"It didn't even touch it. It might as well have been water."

Ned stared at her. "I see," he said.

"If there were only something to give me an hour's rest—"

"Yes, ma'am. There is something," said Ned Thompson softly. "You just rest a minute and we'll get you straightened out."

His face was white when he reached the nursing station, but somehow he kept his voice under control. "Get her a half grain of M.S. right now," he said to Allison, scribbling the order on the chart.

"All right. I'll have to get Davis—"

"Well, get her." He waited until the medications nurse came into the station.

"A half grain, Doctor?"

"That's what it says on the order sheet."

She opened the drawer, slowly, began to prepare the syringe. Ned watched her take out the two quarter-grain tablets, drop them into the syringe, draw in a cc of water. She took a small alcohol sponge in one hand, picked up the syringe.

He held his hand out. "I'll give it," he said tightly.

Her eyes widened for just an instant. Then: "If you wish."

"I wish." He took the syringe and turned to Allison. "After I give this I want you to check Mrs. Conway every fifteen minutes without fail until you go off duty . . . I mean you, not somebody else, okay? I want that woman kept out of pain tonight if you have to give her a half a grain every quarter hour until dawn. Got that now?"

"Check her every fifteen minutes," said Allison, her eyes wide. "I'll take care of it."

"Fine," said Ned Thompson. He glared at Davis, then turned on his heel and strode down the hall.

He was still fuming when he met Gibby for coffee at 11:00. "I spilled it," he said. "I'm sorry, but if she doesn't know we're onto her now, she's an imbecile."

Gibby looked stricken. "I thought she gave me a funny look when she checked out the drawer with me a little while ago. And you know, there haven't been any complaints all evening. But she didn't seem scared. She kept giving me that weird little grin of hers. Patronizing, almost." The girl stirred her coffee in silence for

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a moment. "Oh, Ned, why did you have to do it that way?"

Thompson shook his head. "I couldn't help myself. Of all the vicious—" He broke off helplessly. "Gibby, Margaret Conway has had the Bad Disease for a long time, and she's put up a real fight, right from the first. I just couldn't stand around and know what was happening and let that creature get away with it. Not with Margaret. If it blows off the lid, it blows off the lid. I'm sorry."

Gibby shrugged. "I just hope it doesn't do worse than that. If she stays, she's going to get her stuff—somehow. But if she can't withhold it from the patients, what can she do?" She dug into her handbag and produced a small envelope. "I filched this out of her handbag this evening. Took it from a pillbox holding a dozen or more just like it."

Ned rolled the tiny dead-white tablet out on his palm, and whistled. "It sure looks like the real stuff. But it could be nitroglycerine or atropine or half a dozen other things that aren't narcotic—"

"It could be M.S. that she's just stolen, too," said Gibby. "You're the doctor. How do you tell?"

Ned dropped the envelope in his pocket. "I'm not sure," he said. "But don't worry. We'll find out."

At 3:00 A.M. they called him to see Mr. Wilcox. "He's had a bad night ever since we came on," the night floor nurse said on the phone. "First he had some trouble breathing, and now he's complaining of chest pain—"

Ned sighed and slipped on his clothes in the dark. The corridor in the quarters was dim; as he stood waiting for the elevator he tried to shake away sleep and orient his thinking. George Wilcox had been doing well—but so soon after a coronary anything could happen. On Fourth he found the man moaning quietly, his face ashen, one hand to his chest.

"When did it start, George?"

"Couple of hours ago, Doc. I thought maybe I could sweat it out, but it's getting worse. Took a couple of my nitroglycerine like I used to, but it didn't ease up a bit."

"Well, this isn't a job for nitroglycerine." Ned listened to his chest and checked his blood pressure, then attached the electrocardiograph leads. After a few moments he rolled up the tracing.

"Can you give me something for it, Doc? It's really hurting."

"We'll take care of that, don't worry. This will probably pass—the tracing doesn't look bad at all."

It didn't look good, either. Ned could not tell whether the changes indicated fresh damage or merely an extension of the old—an expert reading in the morning would tell that; but George Wilcox was in trouble. Back at the nursing sta-

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tion Ned made a note on the chart and wrote orders with the night nurse peering over his shoulder.

"He gets sick with M.S., you know," the nurse said.

"So he does. We'd better make this a hundred milligrams of Demerol, and put him in the oxygen tent for the rest of the night. We'll see how he looks in the morning."

In the intern's quarters he sat staring at the clock, and out at the growing light in the East. He was wide-awake now. With a disgusted sigh he went out to the lounge and poured himself a cup of coffee.

Presently he took the white tablet Gibby had given him out of his pocket and stared at it. It looked like a sixth-grain tablet of morphine sulphate. But there was no mark to distinguish it from non-narcotic drugs like nitroglycerine, used for relief of the pain of angina pectoris—or atropine, given pre-operatively to reduce secretions. The Narcotics Bureau could analyze it, of course, and tell them what it was—but that might take weeks, and even then it would be evidence that had been illegally obtained . . .

He stared at the tablet, and then suddenly popped it under his tongue. He waited for a few moments. Nothing happened. Then his fingers began to tingle as a feeling of warmth crept down his arms and legs. He felt suddenly light-headed as he stood up. In the mirror his face was flushed, his pupils large and black.

He didn't have a blood pressure cuff on, but he knew what it would show. The tablet was not morphine sulphate. Nitroglycerine. A vascular dilator, used by patients with angina pectoris to ease the pain of their hungry heart muscle. About as dangerous as a shot of good whiskey, and not even remotely as narcotic.

He shrugged in disgust and went back to bed.

He was tired the next day, and by afternoon he felt it in every bone. It was a day of heavy admissions, with too many little decisions to make, too much rapid thinking-deciding-forgetting-reconsidering-remembering-checking which is the intern's work. When Endicott relieved him at 5:30 he drove downtown to supper, took in a very dull movie, and was back at the hospital by nine, determined to sleep and angry because he was still wide-awake.

Instead of sleeping he read, or pretended to read, but his mind kept coming back in anger and bafflement to the thin brown nurse on the Fourth floor.

How was she getting her drugs?

He had checked with Gibby when he returned, and heard what he had dreaded hearing. No significant complaints. A tight, patronizing smile on Davis's lips—

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and no sign of any narcotics withheld.

But something more fundamental lay deeper: *why* did she do it? That was the question that was so baffling, the thing that made it so sickening and shameful. What she was doing was cruel and vicious, certainly, but it was not the cruelty of meanness. It was not cruelty for the sake of cruelty. It was, ultimately, the cruelty of selfishness—utter, abysmal, soul-consuming selfishness. She glutted herself at the expense of the pain and need of others. She drank, and in drinking fouled the spring. But surely she had not always been that way. What strange door in her mind had opened and started her need? The door of idle curiosity? Of bitterness and hunger? The hope of filling ever-so-briefly some gaping well of loneliness? Of brightening for a few moments some barrenness of life? Perhaps . . . but how much more lonely she was now, how much more barren! She must have fought it once—fought to close the door. Now she no longer fought—she fed on it. Now she didn't care about the pain and need of others . . .

And that, of course, was what made her so dangerous. *She didn't care any more.* Normal restraints of common humanity had been sidetracked, somehow. They didn't apply to her any more. That was why she couldn't simply be sent away.

And always you knew she'd be back, someday. Another face, another body, but *she'd* be back—

He growled at himself and picked up the phone, even though it was barely 10:00. "Got the chow hall open, Gibby? Be a good girl, huh? I'm starving."

He met her in the basement corridor, and there was trouble in her eyes. Her blonde hair was rumpled, her cheeks very red. She looked close to tears. "I don't like this, Ned. I'm beginning to get scared."

"No complaints, eh?"

"Nothing." She pushed back a stray forelock wearily. "I pushed this thing, and now I'm afraid it's getting out of control. Maybe we should have fired her, right at the start, just got rid of her and forgotten the whole mess."

"It won't go away just because we close our eyes, Gibby. You know that."

"But what can we do?"

"Watch and wait."

"That's what scares me. What are we waiting *for?*"

"If we knew that we'd have her right where we want her." Ned sighed. "If only there were some way we could really put the screws on her, shake her down—"

"Well, there isn't."

"No, I mean unofficially. Get Endicott into it with me, and the two of us can take her out somewhere and break her apart."

"Oh, that would be just great,"

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said Gibby heatedly. "Get right down in the gutter and fight it out on her level, I suppose! And you're supposed to be a doctor."

"Well, damn it, Gibby—"

"Now look, Dr. Thompson—you either forget about that sort of thing, or else you can forget I ever thought you were worth spitting at. If you so much as lay a hand on her you can count me out, do you understand? I won't play it that way, that's all. I just *won't.*" She blew her nose and tried to wipe her eyes with her starched cuff. "I love my work more than anything else I know. I wouldn't ever want to do anything except nursing, and I hate people like that woman who come in and dirty it and degrade it. But I won't let them get me dirty trying to stop them."

He watched her across the table, then suddenly grinned and tossed her his handkerchief. "Blow," he said. "Go ahead, don't be afraid, wake up the whole first floor. We'll sweat it out a while longer."

"None of this strong-arm stuff?"

"Not a bit of it."

She grinned back, and blew with vigor. "Maybe you're not such a slob after all," she said.

He took Gibby's master key to the narcotics drawer—an infringement of the strictest of all hospital rules—after promising faithfully to return it to the nursing office when he was through, and made his way to Fourth floor after the shift change at eleven o'clock. Somewhere there was an answer; there had to be, yet in three days they were further from the answer than when they started.

He walked into the medications alcove, took a stool, and sat staring at the high wall cabinets filled with stock medications, at the gleaming stainless-steel sink, the syringe sterilizer, the sterile tray with needles, sponges, tourniquets, forceps. This was where she worked, her niche, her corner in the busy activities of the place—but the walls did not repeat the echoes of her thoughts.

Murky thoughts, Ned Thompson reflected. Desperate and empty thoughts. No escape from the ever-present fear of all drug addicts, even here in the midst of plenty. He opened the drawer, stared down at the tubes and vials and ampules. Piece by piece he emptied the drawer, narcotics tray, emergency tray, injection medications of all sorts, trying to think as she would think, to see what she might see, trying to find the simple answer he knew could be found here. Thinking—

But what does a drug addict think? A preoccupation with two principles, with all else cast aside. First: get the drug, at any cost whatsoever; second: don't get caught. Simple, and imponderable.

And then, quite suddenly, another kind of door opened in his

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mind—and he knew what Jane Davis was doing. It was obvious—and fearful. He blinked at the drawer open before him, and smoked a cigarette, and then smoked another. Then, quickly, he replaced the drugs and slammed the drawer shut, as though he had to get it closed quickly, *quickly,* while there was still time. He wiped large wet drops from his forehead.

He knew now that they couldn't go on waiting any longer. They wouldn't catch her because they couldn't risk it at this price. Fire her, yes, get rid of her, *fast,* while there was still time. But no more waiting—

He started to call Gibby, then realized how foolish it was. She'd be in bed, there would be plenty of time to warn her in the morning that Davis mustn't come to work another day, not another hour. By three o'clock the formalities could be taken care of.

He went downstairs and fell asleep like a rock. At breakfast he would tell Gibby . . .

But he never got to breakfast. His day started at 5:15 A.M. with a call to the emergency room that drove every other thought from his mind. There are few true medical emergencies that demand immediate action, on the spot, *now;* but diabetic acidosis is that kind of emergency. The patient was a boy of seven years who had never been suspected of diabetes before. When he arrived at St. Christopher's emergency room, he was nearly dead. Ned Thompson met Dr. Morton, the attending man, coming in the door to the hospital as Ned ran upstairs; they nodded without words, because they knew what lay ahead for both of them.

After six hours of solid unbroken work, they knew the child would not die if they kept at it. Morton took a break for lunch, and brought Ned back a sandwich. Later, Ned stepped out into the corridor for a smoke, and nearly tripped over the floor nurse coming to fetch him. "They've been paging you for half an hour, Doctor. You have a new coronary in 301, just came in in the ambulance, and three other new patients to see—"

It was one of those days. He saw the coronary just long enough to assure himself that an expiration was not imminent, and got back to the diabetic. By four o'clock in the afternoon Dr. Morton nodded, glanced over the chart, and then at the boy, who was sitting up in bed, wan but cheerful. "Well, I think we're out of the woods. These juveniles are tough."

"You're telling me," said Ned. "You think these fluid orders will hold him for an hour or so?"

"I think so." The older man slipped on his jacket. "And Ned—thanks. Hope you haven't got too much piled up on you."

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He left as Dr. Endicott stuck his long nose into the room. "Say, Ned—old Wilcox is having trouble up on Fourth. Will you have a chance to look in on him?"

Ned stepped into the corridor with him. "What's wrong?"

"Well, you know as well as I do. Dr. Frank read yesterday's tracing and figured he was extending, and he just hasn't got much anterior cardiac wall left to work with. I talked to Frank about it, and he'd like you to look in, then give him a call."

Ned nodded. "Heavy schedule upstairs today?"

Endicott's face settled into a grimace. "It's the Chopper's day to scream, you know. He's starting one of these subtotal disembowelments in about ten minutes and I'm anchor man on the retractor."

Ned was checking the boy again when he heard himself being paged. It was Allison on Fourth. "You'd better come up right away, Doctor. It's Mr. Wilcox. He's very bad."

"But Dr. Endicott just saw him—"

"He's got much worse in just the last few minutes."

"Chest pain?"

"Terrible pain. He had a hundred milligrams of Demerol at two o'clock and then fifty more an hour ago—"

"Give him another hundred. I'll be right up." He slammed down the telephone, swearing under his breath. The diabetic's chart was still in his hand; he scribbled some orders, studied them a moment, trying to force Mr. Wilcox out of his mind, then grunted in approval and started for the stairs. On the way he met another of the attending men, and was stopped for a report on another patient. It was almost ten minutes before he reached the Fourth floor, and nearly tripped over Jane Davis emerging from Mr. Wilcox's room—

He stared at her, unbelieving, then remembered with a jolt. He hadn't told Gibby. He hadn't even seen Gibby. The nurse's eyes caught his, held them for an instant—bottomless, expressionless eyes.

"That the Demerol for Wilcox?"

She nodded, and moved past him down the hall.

On the bed George Wilcox was gasping, his hand pressed tight to his chest. He looked bad. A single glance at the gray-faced man told Ned Thompson more than a dozen questions. Allison was there in the room, moving birdlike, twittering in her over-efficient way. Ned checked the man's blood pressure. "Get an ampule of nor-epinephrine in 500 cc of water. Quick!"

She started for the door. The man in the bed gave a sudden loud gasp, turned blue, convulsed—

"Wait," said Ned Thompson.

"It'll only take two minutes, Doctor."

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"That's two minutes too long." He stared at the pinprick in the man's arm, the tiny trickle of blood already congealing, the stained sponge fallen down from the injection site.

And then with a snarl he was out the door, pelting down the hall to the nursing station and into the medications alcove.

The woman there whirled, her eyes wide. The syringe still lay on the tray, the tiny glass ampule sitting on the counter nearby . . .

She kicked him hard in the shin, cursing as her hand flashed out for the ampule. Ned's hand crashed down on her wrist until she screamed out, her fingers opening to release the tubule. Swiftly he plunged his hand into her pocket, felt another ampule there, unbroken. He tossed it out on the counter beside the other. "All right now," he panted, "that's all for you. You've got a murder to answer for now."

"I should have seen it as soon as I knew it was nitroglycerine in her purse," he said later to Gibby. "The only people who carry nitroglycerine are people with angina pectoris, and she didn't have that trouble, not at her young age. There was only one other thing she could have wanted it for—and I made my mistake when I didn't realize what fantastic chances she'd take. We knew she was withholding drugs, of course. It didn't even occur to me that she might start *substituting—*"

"But why the nitroglycerine?"

"It's indistinguishable from morphine, in tablets like that. It dissolves like morphine. There are plenty of coronaries on this floor getting morphine who might even get some pain relief from the nitro she gave them when she pocketed the morphine. But Demerol was different—it's already dissolved, in sterile ampules, in solution. And in the emergency tray right in the same drawer, another drug, also dissolved, in solution, in identical ampules." He sighed and rubbed his forehead. "I knew last night that she must be substituting Coramine for Demerol. A powerful cardiac stimulant. As good a way to kill a man with a sick, weakened heart muscle as a bullet through the brain. She's undoubtedly used it before and got away with it. This time she picked a man who was a little too sick."

Gibby sighed and turned back to her coffee. "Feels funny," she said. "It's such a relief to have it over—but now there's nothing to watch."

"Come watch a movie with me tonight, then. You need a rest. There's one downtown that will rest you just fine."

"Oh?"

"They say it's a great picture," said Ned Thompson. "All about this doctor that strangles his patient, see—"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**HELEN MABRY BALLARD**
TITLE:	***Wind in the Afternoon***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Sheriff Abel Walsh
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Neither crisis nor calamity can break the rhythm of farm life—no, not even murder. Yet in a land of white farmhouses, clean fields, and straight fences, why should there be any murder at all? Why?*

ABEL WALSH STARED UNHAPPILY AT the body sprawled in the barnyard. It lay face down in fallen leaves, one leg angled, the other stretched back until the heavy, manure-caked boot touched the wall of the barn. There were brown leaves on the grizzled hair and over the back, and one leaf that was dyed at the edges near a hole in the dirty gray sweater. The newly risen sun slanted across the enclosure, throwing shadows from a wind-stripped oak against the face of the barn, but it was pallid light with no warmth in it for Walsh and the two men beside him.

The sheriff's unhappiness had nothing to do with the cold, nor with sentiment for the dead Matt Kershaw. It sprang from the humbling suspicion that this was something he couldn't handle, that no previous experience had prepared him to cope with murder. It was irritating to know that Doc Hanslow would agree; the doubt in the coroner's eyes had increased the sheriff's own self-distrust.

He lifted his head and turned to the big farmer in milk-splashed overalls and windbreaker.

"What brought you down here so early, Muller?"

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"He's my brother-in-law, ain't he?" retorted the farmer, as though that were answer enough. "I found him and called you from the house, then waited till you come. Now I got to get back and finish the chores."

Walsh looked beyond the yard to the farmhouse and its smokeless chimney.

"Where's his wife?"

"Don't you read the paper?" asked the doctor. "They buried her yesterday. Pneumonia. Nancy and I were in high school together—Lord, what a long time ago! She was a pretty little thing, full of laughter."

"Not now she wasn't," growled Muller. "Not after fourteen years with *him*. Look, Sheriff, I told you I have chores waiting. Hunt me up at home if you need me."

He turned on his heel, ignoring the coroner's disapproving stare, jumped into a pick-up, and rattled off down the driveway. The dry leaves rustled, stirred by a puff of wind. Beyond the barb-wire fence a red cow mooed piteously, begging relief for overloaded udder and oozing teats.

"A chore that's waited too long," remarked the coroner. "She's hurting, poor beast." He blew his fingers for warmth, then thrust them deep in his overcoat pockets. "Come on, Walsh, let's finish this up before I freeze."

Finish! thought the sheriff. *I don't even know how to start.*

Pride stiffened him. *Pull yourself together—do something, anything at all.* He stooped and lifted the stained leaf. It came reluctantly, bringing gray fibers from the sweater. He brushed off the other leaves and thought of the wind that had stripped an oak tree and thrown a brown coverlet over both the yard and the corpse.

"Here's your weapon." Hanslow, tramping to keep warm, had made a discovery. "Matt's own rifle, by the nameplate."

Walsh lifted the gun by the stock, then, remembering fingerprints, hurriedly shifted his hold to the trigger guard. He propped it against the barn and said, "There'll be a bullet somewhere," and felt the wall until he found it. He dug it out with his knife, juggled it thoughtfully, then dropped it into his pocket. "Okay," he said. "Let's turn him over."

They rolled the body off the bare ground and onto a drift of leaves.

Hanslow gasped. "Look at his face! He knew, poor devil." Then the doctor's fingers moved swiftly, unfastening buttons, probing the wound.

Walsh asked without much hope, "Any chance he did it himself?"

"Not Matt Kershaw! And don't ask me when—he's been lying in frost all night. Probably not later than seven yesterday evening, and certainly not earlier than around five because I was down here talking to him."

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"I didn't know you knew Kershaw."

"I didn't, but I knew Nancy and once I even imagined I was in love with her, in the idiotic way boys do imagine they are in love. She didn't reciprocate, worse luck, so I wooed the family. Ran down to the farm on Saturdays and blistered my palms hoeing her father's weeds. I was in college when she got married. The news threw me into a two-day drunk and a bitter renunciation of all women. Life is tough for kids."

"You married yourself," commented the sheriff.

"Puppy love doesn't last. Being coroner and staff doctor at the hospital keeps me pretty busy. I'd almost forgotten Nancy until I read the funeral notice, but for old times' sake I dropped in on the services."

"Matt asked you home after the funeral?"

"He did not. I came," said Hanslow disgustedly, "because I was a sentimental fool. I couldn't get Nancy out of my head. I wallowed in tender memories. After finishing at the hospital I drove out to see the grieving widower. God knows why. I suppose I thought we could weep together. A mistake, because Matt wasn't grieving—not much he wasn't."

Walsh looked down at the body on the leaves. "Was he out here?"

"No, in the barn, feeding the horses. He was shedding no tears and made it offensively plain that he desired no consolation. I washed out sentiment and came home. Fortunately, as it happened, because Belle had invited company for dinner."

"You left here at five?"

"Thereabouts. Muller may know. That's his pasture beyond the stubble field and I saw him on the hill driving home his cows. Here's the wagon come for Kershaw."

Men in overalls picked up the body and, whistling cheerfully, carried it in a basket to the waiting van.

"*Sic transit* Kershaw," murmured the doctor. He pulled thoughtfully at his lower lip. "That's the first homicide since either of us took office. Are you worried?"

"A little," confessed the sheriff.

Worried—but not so much as before, because of what he'd picked up just by keeping his eyes open and noticing things. Maybe he wouldn't get very far, but at least he now had a start.

Hanslow zippered his bag. "I'll be getting back to town." He winced as the cow, bellowing now, swung sideways to rake her flank against the barbed wire. "For God's sake, Walsh, put that poor brute out of her misery."

Walsh stripped the cow—giving the milk to the hogs for want of a human recipient—and then turned the horses out to pasture. It did not seem to him incongru-

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ous that a county official should postpone his own job to finish a dead man's chores, because as a countryman he knew that was the way it had to be on a farm. Neither crisis nor calamity can break the rhythm of farm life. Chores went on at their appointed times in spite of illness or daylight saving—or even murder. The rhythm neither quickened nor slowed; it was as immutable as the rhythm of the earth itself. Outsiders, accustomed to quick changes and uneven pace, seldom understood this. Dr. Hanslow had thought it odd that the sheriff had allowed Muller to return home to finish what had to be done.

But Muller must be questioned sometime and Walsh now set out to find him. He worked at the problem while his hands automatically guided the car along the country road between stubble fields and rolling, oak-dotted pasture land. Muller had been on the hill near the barn. He could have seen the murderer, or he could have shot Kershaw himself. Either way, what he said—or what he didn't say—would be important. But the sheriff had never seen Muller before that morning—so how could he tell if the farmer was lying if he didn't know how the man acted when he was telling the truth? The sheriff wished he knew more about Muller, that he'd had the sense to ask Hanslow about him. He could have learned a lot about Nancy's brother from Doc, only like a fool he hadn't thought to ask. Walsh sighed, depressed anew by the conviction of his own inadequacy.

A mailbox, black-lettered *ED MULLER,* jutted into the road. Walsh braked and studied the white house at the end of the drive, liking the green window-trim, the chrysanthemums blooming by the steps, the shade trees that blocked a view of the barn. He lowered his eyes to the drive and grunted approval of the smooth, graveled bed.

He parked at the house, not because he expected to find Muller indoors in mid-morning, but because talking to the wife might help Walsh's understanding of the husband. If there was a wife. He wasn't even sure of that.

There was. He found her in the backyard hanging out the wash. She was a flat-chested, sharp-featured woman who heard his errand without stopping her work, and then said that Ed was at the barn.

She asked grudgingly, "Want I should call him on the extension?"

"I'll find him, thanks." He sensed hostility and worked to counter it. "You got a pretty place, flowers and all, and everything so neat. Must take a heap of work."

He had touched the right chord. She tossed her head and said proudly, "Work or not, that's how I like it. So does Ed. Even in bad

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times—that drought five-six years back—even then Ed never let things get run down."

"The drought hit you hard?"

"It hit everybody hard. But we come through all right."

Walsh hunkered down by the clothes basket and held up a miniature pair of jeans.

"How old's the boy?"

"Going on four. That's another reason. No matter what, that kid's going to remember a decent home. Good house, nice garden, clean fields, and straight fences. Not weeds and tin cans and an old shack like some."

"It'll be a good memory," said the sheriff, rising.

As he turned to leave she asked abruptly, "You know who did for Matt?"

"I'm working on it."

The thin lips tightened. "Don't work at it too hard. Matt was a no-good."

Ed Muller switched off the ignition and climbed reluctantly out of the pick-up.

"Let's get it over quick. Everything's behind this morning, and I got to get back to Kershaw's."

"I took care of the cow and the horses and the hogs. Anything else?"

"Thanks," said the farmer, obviously relieved. "No, that's all till evening. There's been a wire sent to Matt's son by his first wife, but he can't get here till tomorrow."

Walsh held out a key. "Better keep this—I locked the house. If Nancy and Doc were schoolmates, she must have been a lot younger than Matt. How come she married a widower twice her age?"

Muller flared into sudden anger. "Because she was a crazy kid and couldn't see the meanness under his soft-soaping ways. Pa argued, but when a girl's nineteen she's of age. Maybe if Ma'd been alive 'twould have been different. Fourteen years of hell she got. Now Matt's dead, and too late to do Nancy any good. It ain't *right!*"

"It ain't right Matt should be dead—not murdered, anyhow. Which is why I have to ask questions. When'd you ride past with your cows?"

"To hell with the way he died! I'll answer questions, I'm no fool to buck the law, but I ain't going to break my neck trying to help you none. It must have been late, because the sun was low and it'd turned cold. Maybe a minute or two after the 4:55 mail plane went over."

"Did you see Matt?"

"You can't see into that yard from the hill—the barn hides it, and the oak tree. All you can see is the house and the driveway. Anyhow, I ain't seen that skunk—alive—since Nancy's funeral. Nor heard his squawky voice, neither. He phoned last night around six thirty, only I was up here in the barn and the wife took the message."

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"See anybody at all?"

"Only Doc rassling the gate at the end of the drive. Right then was when the wind first sprung up. It pretty near tore the gate away from him."

"Why'd Matt phone you?"

"Wondered if a couple of missing steers had broken into my pasture."

"That why you went down this morning?"

"No," said Muller shortly. " 'Twas private business."

"When it's murder nothing's private."

It was not easy to break down the reserve that self-respect had put up between a man's personal concerns and prying outsiders. Somehow it didn't seem decent. The sheriff wondered if what you got was worth the price. The big farmer was now scowling sullenly at the ground and repeating that he was no fool to buck the law. The story would come—truthfully enough in such parts as Muller knew could be checked—but at best there would be evasions and omissions, and in the telling of it a deep hurt to the man's pride.

Still scowling, Muller said, "It was this note he bought up for money I'd borrowed to carry us through the drought. I thought to pay it off right away, but seems like every year there's something —"

Short crops. Stock hit by blackleg because of poor vaccine. Squirrels that ate off the barley . . . all bad enough in the telling, but probably much worse in reality. Walsh wondered how much the wife knew. He pitied Muller's embarrassment and mendaciously invented similar misfortunes of his own.

"If you've been a farmer, you understand," said Muller, reassured. "You know bad luck runs in streaks sometimes—nobody's fault, it just does. The note's due again pretty soon and yesterday after the funeral Matt said he wouldn't renew. We'd had a row. I'd told him overwork had put Nancy in her grave and called him a damned wife killer, so he got mean. I ain't got the money, I'm strapped. Matter of fact, there's another note at the bank."

He had worried through a sleepless night, had even thought of selling out and trying elsewhere.

"Only it's our home, we got a feeling for it. I thought about leasing but right now it's hard to find renters. Come dawn, I decided to try making a deal with Matt—let him use some of the pasture for free, or something like that. Only he was already dead."

"There's the son."

"He won't give no trouble, I know him. Listen, hustle this up, will you? I got work—"

"Get along with it, then. I want to visit with the neighbors."

The sheriff called at farmhouses

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and talked to the farm women. Everywhere he asked the same questions, and always in the back of his mind were thoughts of a blood-stained leaf and of a suffering cow that had raked her flank against barbed wire. At the fifth house a breezy woman confessed without shame to eavesdropping on the party line and told him what he needed to know.

The sun was high when he returned to the Kershaw farm. Here he found one of his deputies shoveling a portion of the yard into a cardboard box.

"Photographer just left," reported the deputy. "You're in luck. The ground's just right—not too hard, not too soft. I got it out all in one chunk."

He fastened the box with gummed paper and handed it to Walsh who scribbled his initials on the brown strip. The deputy added his own, then carried the shovel and box to his car and departed. Walsh followed him with his eyes until the car disappeared around a bend in the driveway. Then he crossed the stubble field, crawled through the six-wire fence that marked the boundary of Muller's pasture, and climbed the hill.

Halfway up the slope a cow path meandered across the face of the hill. Walsh stopped on the trail and turned to look back across brittle yellow stubble to where barn and oak tree shut off all view of the yard. He shifted his eyes to the ugly, boxlike house some hundred feet to the right of the barn, then followed the length of curving driveway down to the heavy wooden gate. Doc had had trouble with that gate when the wind sprang up.

He looked back at the house. He had been through it that morning before locking up, and in the front hall he had seen the nails and patch of faded wallpaper that marked where Kershaw's gun had hung. How long would it take a man to get from the cow path to the front hall, grab the gun, and sneak back to the yard? There'd be a stop for the fence, and probably another to peek cautiously around the corner of the barn. Say three minutes altogether, give or take a little either way.

Three minutes, thought Walsh; *now I know who shot Kershaw.*

He drove back to the county seat and telephoned the coroner for an appointment.

"After dinner," suggested Hanslow. "Belle's going to some shindig but I'll beg off. It'll be a relief—I'm sick of shindigs."

Several hours later, in the doctor's comfortable study, the host was glaring indignantly at his guest. Between them a log fire crackled cheerfully.

"Utter nonsense," snorted the doctor. "Ed hated Matt, sure—but he wouldn't kill him! I know, I know, you haven't said he did, but you might just as well have. Motive

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and opportunity, you say. What opportunity? Because he rode past with his cows? Matt's phone call at six thirty knocks opportunity into a cocked hat, but you say anyone could have imitated his squawky voice. You make the preposterous statement that Matt didn't telephone because he was already dead. Of all the idiotic—Ed phoned himself, I suppose? Anyhow, where's your evidence?"

"You didn't give me time to tell it," said the sheriff mildly. "A lot of things point to Matt's being already dead by then. The cow, for one. She wasn't just a few hours overdue, she was full to bursting. She hadn't been milked for twenty-four hours. Why? Horses, hogs, and one cow—that's all the chores there were—and he was already at the horses when you saw him. If he was alive at six thirty, *why hadn't he milked the cow?"*

Hanslow stared. "You call *that* evidence?" He swung out of his chair, walked across to the bar, and mixed two highballs. He handed one to Walsh.

"Doctor's prescription. You're tired and can't think straight or you'd realize that almost anything could have interfered. Maybe the cow had wandered off. Or the horses had broken loose. Or Matt had a dizzy spell. *I* don't know—I just know you can't make a timetable on the evidence of one unmilked cow."

Walsh sipped his drink gratefully. He wasn't really tired, just depressed. A while back, up there on the hill, he'd felt pretty pleased with himself. He'd forgotten about all the mess that had to follow—

"It wasn't just the cow. There's something else that I'll explain later. I'm telling this bit by bit the way it worked out. At first I thought Muller'd made up that phone call, but he didn't. I found a woman who'd listened in. She'd recognized Matt's voice—or thought she had—and what it said was just about what Ed had told me. But there's an extension between Muller's house and the barn, so he could have made the call himself. For an alibi it would have been better if he picked somebody besides his own wife, but he mightn't have thought of that. He and his wife are pretty close, most likely she'd come to his mind first. But I do know that Matt didn't call because he was already dead. So I know when he was killed, and how."

"How is easy—he was shot. But *when?"* Hanslow smiled ironically. "Don't strain my credulity. Did you read it in the cards, or was it the Lord Almighty who told you?"

"I never thought of that," said Walsh slowly. "The last, I mean. Maybe that's it. When a dumb cluck like me doesn't know what to do, maybe God *does* speak out to point the way to truth. Not in words. But through things. Like a leaking udder. Or a bullet hole in

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a barn. Or dead leaves. Or a body in the wrong place."

"It can't be the highball," mused the doctor. "It wasn't that strong. What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about footmarks under the leaves that show where two men had stood, one against the barn, the other some yards in front. They stood for maybe five minutes. I'm talking about a murder that was like an execution. This morning the sun shone full on the barn, but in late evening there'd be shade. A man wouldn't stand against a shadowed wall, not on a bitter evening when the sun was low. But if somebody with a rifle forced him to—somebody with murder in his heart but with a crazy idea of justice in his mind—*then* he'd stand there, watching the trigger finger, dying ten deaths while his sins were told over and over and sentence finally passed."

"You mean Ed had some fantastic notion of avenging his sister? That's impossible—Ed isn't the melodramatic type. Anyhow, I maintain Matt was killed later."

"With dead leaves all over the yard and all over the body—*but none underneath?* We rolled him over and the ground was bare. With the ground bare underneath his body, that means he was killed *before the wind came up*—but not so long before but what the blood was still wet enough to stain one of the leaves. No, he was not killed by Muller—Muller couldn't have got there in time. He was still on the hill, because he saw you at the gate and the hill's the only place you can see around that bend in the driveway. There was a chance somebody hid in the house till you were gone, the only one Muller might have seen and not reported. His wife would do a lot to save that good home and have security for their boy."

"Not Kate Muller. It just couldn't have been."

"It wasn't, because right then she was delivering eggs to a neighbor. I talked to the woman who bought them. That leaves only one person. Doc," said the sheriff dejectedly, "why did you do it? Because of Nancy?"

For a moment the doctor sat very still. Then, unsmiling, he lifted his glass in salute.

"I underrated you, Walsh." He emptied the glass and rolled it between his hands. "Yes, Nancy. I lied about it being puppy love. It was real. Funny how the real thing sticks long after you think you've forgotten. You plug away at work you like, you marry a woman who makes you comfortable and sees that you meet the right people, you get ahead. Damn it, you're even *happy*. Then one day you read of the death of a farm girl you haven't seen for fourteen years, and suddenly nothing else matters."

He went to the bar, poured himself a stiff shot, drank it, then replenished the glass.

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"I saw her in the coffin. Not *my* Nancy, but a thin, worn-out old woman. *Old*—at thirty-three. I went to Kershaw's to find out why. I tried the house first, and when nobody answered the door I pushed it open and called out . . . I found him in the barn. A vile brute. Nancy had been a bad bargain to him— he admitted it, and he bragged that now he could get someone younger and stronger. I don't remember going back for the gun, just that all at once I had it. I herded him against the barn and told him why he had to die. He—he was frightened. Ed didn't hear the shot—a plane flew over just then. Telephoning was as much an alibi for Ed as for me. I wouldn't want poor Ed to have trouble."

"Is this a confession?"

"You've no witness. I'm safe enough—if that's what I want. I don't know—I wiped the gun. I was at home with guests from six o'clock on. Ed and your farm woman will swear that it was Matt who telephoned."

"The leaves say different."

"You say there were none under the body. I can say there were. You've made mistakes, Walsh. You let Ed go home before we turned the body, and you forgot about technicians, so there are no photographs. It can be your word against mine."

"I was pretty dumb," admitted the sheriff. "But I caught on later. We've got molds of the footprints and pictures of the ground where he'd bled, and we have a piece of the ground dug up ready for the D.A. Oak leaves are waterproof, Doc. Blood could spill over them and leak through cracks—but it'd be spotty, not in one big patch like this. Your word won't stand against all that."

"I see," said the doctor. "I didn't know that about oak leaves." He gulped his drink and rose to lean against the mantel.

He said at last, "Matt was a skunk. Who cares if somebody shoots a skunk?"

"You do, Doc. When a temperate man tries to drink himself blind he cares a lot."

You care because you're no true murderer, just a decent kindly man who lost his head. You care because you're a doctor, and your job is to save lives, not take them. With the real bad boys, the toughies, the only worry would be not to get caught. For a sensitive man like you it would be something deeper. Drinking wouldn't help much, you'd still have to live with it. In prison or out, it would always be with you. That would be the real punishment—not bars but the fact that it would always be with you.

The sheriff wanted to tell Doc that he understood, but he couldn't find the right words.

He cleared his throat.

"Okay," he said. "Doc, get your hat and let's go."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **DASHIELL HAMMETT**

TITLE: ***The Barber and His Wife***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: A generation ago

COMMENTS: *An early and "unknown" Hammett story in which the characters are a foreshadowing of the great ones who came later in* THE MALTESE FALCON *and* THE GLASS KEY.

EACH MORNING AT SEVEN THIRTY the alarm clock on the table beside their bed awakened the Stemlers to perform their daily comedy — a comedy that varied from week to week in degree only.

Louis Stemler, disregarding the still-ringing clock, leaped out of bed and went to the open window, where he stood inhaling and exhaling with a great show of enjoyment — throwing out his chest and stretching his arms voluptuously. He enjoyed this most in the winter, and would prolong his stay before the open window until his body was icy under his pajamas. In the coast city where the Stemlers lived the morning breezes were chill enough, whatever the season, to make his display of ruggedness sufficiently irritating to Pearl.

Meanwhile, Pearl had turned off the alarm and closed her eyes again in semblance of sleep. Louis was reasonably confident that his wife was still awake; but he could not be certain. So when he ran into the bathroom to turn on the water in the tub, he was none too quiet.

He then re-entered the bedroom to go through an elaborate and complicated set of exercises, after which he returned to the bathroom, got into the tub and splashed merrily — long enough to assure any listener that to him a cold bath was a thing of pleasure. Rubbing himself with a coarse towel, he began whistling; and always it was a tune reminiscent of the First World War. Just now *Keep the Home Fires Burning* was his choice. This was his favorite, rivaled

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only by *'Till We Meet Again*, though occasionally he rendered *Katy, What Are You Going to Do to Help the Boys*, or *How're You Going to Keep Them Down on the Farm*. He whistled low and flatly, keeping time with the brisk movements of the towel. At this point Pearl would usually give way to her irritation to the extent of turning over in bed, and the rustling of the sheets would come pleasantly from the bedroom to her husband's ears. This morning as she turned she sighed faintly, and Louis, his eager ears catching the sound, felt a glow of satisfaction.

Dry and ruddy, he came back to the bedroom and began dressing, whistling under his breath and paying as little apparent attention to Pearl as she to him, though each was on the alert for any chance opening through which the other might be vexed. Long practice in this sort of warfare had schooled them to such a degree, however, that an opening seldom presented itself. Pearl was at a decided disadvantage in these morning encounters, inasmuch as she was on the defensive, and her only weapon was a pretense of sleep in the face of her husband's posturing. Louis, even aside from his wife's vexation, enjoyed every bit of his part in the silent wrangle; the possibility that perhaps after all she was really asleep and not witnessing his display of manliness was the only damper on his enjoyment.

When Louis had one foot in his trousers, Pearl got out of bed and into her kimono and slippers, dabbed a little warm water on her face, and went into the kitchen to prepare breakfast. In the ensuing race she forgot her slight headache. It was a point of honor with her never to rise until her husband had his trousers in his hand, and then to have his breakfast on the table in the kitchen — where they ate it — by the time he was dressed. Thanks to the care with which he knotted his necktie, she usually succeeded. Louis's aim, of course, was to arrive in the kitchen fully dressed and with the morning paper in his hand before the meal was ready, and to be extremely affable over the delay. This morning, as a concession to a new shirt — a white silk one with broad cerise stripes — he went in to breakfast without his coat and vest, surprising Pearl in the act of pouring the coffee.

"Breakfast ready, pet?" he asked.

"It will be by the time you're dressed," his wife called attention to his departure from the accepted code.

And so this morning honors were about even . . .

Louis read the sports pages while he ate, with occasional glances at his cerise-striped sleeves. He was stimulated by the clash between the stripe and his crimson sleeve-garters. He had a passion for red, and it testified to the strength of the taboos of his kind that he did not wear red neckties.

"How do you feel this morning, pet?" he asked after he had read what a reporter had to say about

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the champion's next fight, and before he started on the account of the previous day's ball games.

"All right."

Pearl knew that to mention the headache would be to invite a display of superiority masked as sympathy, and perhaps an admonition to eat more beef, and certainly one to take more exercise; for Louis, never having experienced any of the ills to which the flesh is heir, was, naturally enough, of the opinion that even where such disorders were really as painful as their possessors' manners would indicate, they could have been avoided by proper care.

Breakfast consumed, Louis lighted a cigar and addressed himself to another cup of coffee. With the lighting of the cigar Pearl brightened a little. Louis, out of consideration for his lungs, smoked without inhaling; and to Pearl this taking of smoke into the mouth and blowing it forth seemed silly and childish. Without putting it into words she had made this opinion known to her husband, and whenever he smoked at home she watched him with a quiet interest which, of all her contrivances, was the most annoying to him. But that it would have been so signal an admission of defeat, he would have given up smoking at home.

The sports pages read — with the exceptions of the columns devoted to golf and tennis — Louis left the table, put on his vest, coat, and hat, kissed his wife, and, with his consciously buoyant step, set out for his shop. He always walked downtown in the morning, covering the twenty blocks in twenty minutes — a feat to which he would allude whenever the opportunity arose . . .

Louis entered his shop with a feeling of pride in no wise lessened by six years of familiarity. To him the shop was as wonderful, as beautiful, as it had been when first opened. The row of green and white automatic chairs, with white-coated barbers bending over the shrouded occupants; the curtained alcoves in the rear with white-gowned manicurists in attendance; the table laden with magazines and newspapers; the clothes-trees; the row of white enameled chairs, at this hour holding no waiting customers; the two Negro bootblacks in their white jackets; the clusters of colored bottles; the smell of tonics and soaps and steam; and around all, the sheen of spotless tiling, porcelain and paint and polished mirrors. Louis stood just within the door and basked in all this while he acknowledged his employees' greetings. All had been with him for more than a year now, and they called him "Lou" in just the correct tone of respectful familiarity — a tribute both to his position in their world and to his geniality.

He walked the length of the shop, trading jests with his barbers — pausing for a moment to speak to George Fielding, real estate, who was having his pink face steamed preparatory to his bi-weekly massage — and then gave his coat and hat to Percy, one of the bootblacks, and

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dropped into Fred's chair for his shave. Around him the odor of lotions and the hum of mechanical devices rose soothingly. Health and this . . . where did those pessimists get their stuff?

The telephone in the front of the shop rang, and Emil, the head-barber, called out, "Your brother wants to talk to you, Lou."

"Tell him I'm shaving. What does he want?"

Emil spoke into the instrument; then, "He wants to know if you can come over to his office some time this morning."

"Tell him 'all right!' "

"Another big deal?" Fielding asked.

"You'd be surprised," Louis replied, in accordance with the traditional wit of barbers.

Fred gave a final pat to Louis's face with a talcumed towel, Percy a final pat to his glowing shoes, and the proprietor stepped from the chair to hide the cerise stripes within his coat again.

"I'm going over to see Ben," he told Emil. "I'll be back in an hour or so."

Ben Stemler, the eldest of four brothers, of which Louis was the third, was a round, pallid man, always out of breath — as if he had just climbed a long flight of steps. He was district sales-manager for a New York manufacturer, and attributed his moderate success, after years of struggling, to his doggedness in refusing to accept defeat. Chronic nephritis, with which he had been afflicted of late years, was more truly responsible for his increased prosperity, however. It had puffed out his face around his protuberant, fishy eyes, subduing their prominence, throwing kindly shadows over their fishiness, and so giving to him a more trustworthy appearance.

Ben was dictating pantingly to his stenographer when Louis entered the office. "Your favor of the . . . would say . . . regret our inability to comply . . . your earliest convenience." He nodded to his brother and went on gasping. "Letter to Schneider . . . are at a loss to understand . . . our Mr. Rose . . ."

The dictation brought to a wheezing end, he sent the stenographer out, and turned to Louis.

"How's everything?" Louis asked.

"Could be worse, Lou, but I don't feel so good."

"Trouble is you don't get enough exercise. Get out and walk; let me take you down to the gym; take cold baths."

"I know, I know," Ben said wearily. "Maybe you're right. But I got something to tell you — something you ought to know — but I don't know how to go about telling you. I — that is —"

"Spit it out!" Louis was smiling. Ben probably had got into trouble of some sort.

"It's about Pearl!" Ben was gasping now, as if he had come from an unusually steep flight of steps.

"Well?" Louis had stiffened in his

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chair, but the smile was still on his face. He wasn't a man to be knocked over by the first blow. He had never thought of Pearl's being unfaithful before, but as soon as Ben mentioned her name he knew that was it. He knew it without another word from Ben; it seemed so much the inevitable thing that he wondered at his never having suspected it.

"Well?" he asked again.

Unable to hit upon a way of breaking the news gently, Ben panted it out hurriedly, anxious to have the job off his hands. "I saw her night before last. At the movies. With a man. Norman Becker! Sells for Litz & Aulitz. They left together — in his car. Bertha was with me — she saw 'em too!"

He closed with a gasp of relief and relapsed into wheezes.

"Night before last," Louis mused. "I was down to the fights — Kid Breen knocked out O'Toole in the second round — and I didn't get home until after one."

From Ben's office to Louis's home was a distance of twenty-four blocks. Mechanically timing himself, he found it had taken him thirty-one minutes — much of the way was uphill — pretty good time at that. Louis had elected to walk home, he told himself, because he had plenty of time, not because he needed time to think the situation over, or anything of that sort. There was nothing to think over. This was a crystal-clear, tangible condition. He had a wife. Another man had encroached, or perhaps only attempted to, on his proprietorship. To a red-blooded he-man the solution was obvious. For these situations men had fists and muscles and courage. For these emergencies men ate beef, breathed at open windows, held memberships in athletic clubs, and kept tobacco smoke out of their lungs. The extent of the encroachment determined, the rest would be simple.

Pearl looked up in surprise from the laundering of some silk things.

"Where were you night before last?" His voice was calm and steady.

"At the movies." Pearl's voice was too casual. The casual was not the note she should have selected — but she knew what was coming anyway.

"Who with?"

Recognizing the futility of any attempt at deception, Pearl fell back upon the desire to score upon the other at any cost — the motive underlying all their relations since the early glamor of mating had worn off.

"With a man! I went there to meet him. I've met him places before. He wants me to go away with him. He reads things besides the sporting-page. He doesn't go to prizefights. He likes the movies. He doesn't like burlesque shows. He inhales cigarette smoke. He doesn't think muscle's everything a man ought to have." Her voice rose high and shrill.

Louis cut into her tirade with a question. He was surprised by her outburst, but he was not a man to be unduly excited by his wife's display of nerves.

"No, not yet, but if I want to I

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will," Pearl answered the question with scarcely a break in her high-pitched chant. "And if I want to, I'll go away with him. He doesn't want beef for every meal. He doesn't take cold baths. He can appreciate things that aren't just brutal. He doesn't worship his body. He ——"

As Louis closed the door behind him he heard his wife's shrill voice still singing her wooer's qualities.

"Is Mr. Becker in?" Louis asked the undersized boy behind a railing in the sales-office of Litz & Aulitz.

"That's him at the desk back in the corner."

Louis opened the gate and walked down the long office between two rows of mathematically arranged desks — two flat desks, a typist, two flat desks, a typist. A rattle of typewriters, a rustling of papers, a drone of voices dictating: "Your favor of . . . our Mr. Hassis . . . would say . . ." Walking with his consciously buoyant step, Louis studied the man in the corner. Built well enough, but probably flabby and unable to stand up against body blows.

He stopped before Becker's desk and the younger man looked up at Louis through pale, harassed eyes.

"Is this Mr. Becker?"

"Yes, sir. Won't you have a seat?"

"No," Louis said evenly, "what I'm going to say ought to be said standing up." He appreciated the bewilderment in the salesman's eyes. "I'm Louis Stemler!"

"Oh! yes," said Becker. Obviously he could think of nothing else to say. He reached for an order blank, but with it in his hand he was still at sea.

"I'm going to teach you," Louis said, "not to fool around with other men's wives."

Becker's look of habitual harassment deepened. Something foolish was going to happen. One could see he had a great dread of being made ridiculous.

"Will you get up?" Louis was unbuttoning his coat.

In the absence of an excuse for remaining seated, Becker got vaguely to his feet. Louis stepped around the corner of the desk and faced the salesman.

"I'm giving you an even break," Louis said, shoulders stiffened, left foot advanced, eyes steady on the embarrassed ones before him.

Becker nodded politely.

The barber shifted his weight from right to left leg and struck the younger man on the mouth, knocking him back against the wall. The confusion in Becker's face changed to anger. So this was what it was to be! He rushed at Louis, to be met by blows that shook him, forced him back, battered him down. Blindly he tried to hold the barber's arms, but the arms writhed free and the fists crashed into his face and body again and again. Becker hadn't walked twenty blocks in twenty minutes, hadn't breathed deeply at open windows, hadn't twisted and lowered and raised and bent his body morning after morning, hadn't spent hours in gym-

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nasiums building up sinew. Such an emergency found him wanting.

Men crowded around the combatants, separating them, holding them apart, supporting Becker, whose legs were sagging.

Louis was breathing easily. He regarded the salesman's bloody face with calm eyes, and said: "After this I guess you won't bother my wife any. If I ever hear of you even saying 'how do' to her again I'll come back and finish the job. Get me?"

Becker nodded dumbly.

Louis adjusted his necktie and left the office.

The matter was cleanly and effectually disposed of. No losing his wife, no running into divorce courts, no shooting or similar cheap melodrama, and above all, no getting into the newspapers as a deceived husband — just a sensible, manly solution of the problem.

He would eat downtown tonight and go to a burlesque show afterward, and Pearl's attack of nerves would have subsided by the time he got home. He would never mention the events of this day, unless some extraordinary emergency made it advisable, but his wife would know that it was always in his mind, and that he had demonstrated his ability to protect what was his.

He telephoned Pearl. Her voice came quietly over the wire. The hysteria had run its course, then. She asked no questions and made no comment upon his intention of remaining downtown for the evening meal.

It was long after midnight when he arrived home. After the show he had met "Dutch" Spreel, the manager of "Oakland Kid McCoy, the most promising lightweight since the days of Young Terry Sullivan," and had spent several hours in a lunchroom listening to Spreel's condemnation of the guile whereby the Kid had been robbed of victory in his last battle — a victory to which the honest world unanimously conceded his right.

Louis let himself into the apartment quietly and switched on the light in the vestibule. Through the open bedroom door he saw that the bed was unoccupied and its surface unruffled. Where was Pearl, then? Surely she wasn't sitting up in the dark. He went through the rooms, switching on the lights.

On the dining-room table he found a note.

I never want to see you again, you brute. It was just like you — as if beating Norman would do any good. I have gone away with him.

Louis leaned against the table while his calm certitude ran out of him. So this was the world! He had given Becker his chance; hadn't taken the advantage of him to which he had been entitled; had beaten him severely — and this was the way it turned out. Why, a man might just as well be a weakling!

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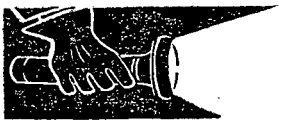

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The good "hard-boiled" novelists write powerfully and convincingly of the underworld, but tend to sound strained and unreal when they introduce an educated, cultivated character. The great ones—Hammett, Chandler, Cain, the Macdonalds (Ross and John D.)—observe a pimp or a poet, a prostitute or a professor, with the same tough accuracy . . . which is one factor that raises their works from thrillerdom to literature.

★ ★ ★ ★ **THE DOOMSTERS, *by Ross Macdonald*** (Knopf, $2.95)
Even Lew Archer's own past actions are involved in the multiple causation we know as "doom." This novel of his efforts to prevent doom from destroying a neurotic family may rewaken in you the classic emotions of pity and terror.

★ ★ ★ ★ **THE MIDNIGHT PLUMBER, *by Maurice Procter*** (Harper, $2.95)
Minute, step-by-step analysis of the technique of a £250,000 robbery and the countermeasures of the Granchester police. Absorbingly believable—and rich in human sidelights as well.

★ ★ ★ **GREEK FIRE, *by Winston Graham*** (Doubleday, $3.95)
American averts Communist coup in Athens, almost losing his life and his new-found love. Smooth, colorful, exciting.

★ ★ ★ **THE CASE OF THE LONG-LEGGED MODELS, *by Erle Stanley Gardner*** (Morrow, $2.95)
High-octane Gardner, in which the trick manipulation of evidence surprises even Perry Mason. And for one of the best recent (1955) Gardner courtroom displays, see the revived THE CASE OF THE GLAMOROUS GHOST (Cardinal, 35¢).

Other reprints of special interest: Meyer Levin's COMPULSION (1956), unusually faithful and enlightening fact-based fiction (Giant Cardinal, 75¢); Charlotte Armstrong's A DRAM OF POISON (1956), Edgar-winner as best novel of its year (Crest, 25¢); Agatha Christie's MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT STYLES (1920), history-making debut of Christie and Poirot (Avon, 35¢); William Rawle Weeks' KNOCK AND WAIT A WHILE, noted here last month as best "first" of 1957 (Bantam, 35¢).

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ROBERT BLOCH**

TITLE: ***Is Betsey Blake Still Alive?***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Hollywood, California

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *By Hollywood standards, Betsey Blake—the Blonde Baby, the madcap Miss Mystery—died at exactly the wrong time. But it had happened before—Valentino, Harlow, James Dean. So Hollywood knew exactly what to do.*

IN APRIL, STEVE RENTED A LITTLE cottage down at the beach. Strictly speaking, it wasn't "down" at all; it stood right on the edge of a steep cliff, and you had to walk almost a quarter of a mile until you got to the nearest steps. But Steve didn't care. He hadn't come to the beach to go swimming.

He'd holed up here for a dual purpose. He wanted to lick his wounds and he wanted to write. Things hadn't gone too well for Steve during the past year—six weeks as a junior writer at one of the major studios, but no contract, and two originals picked up by small independent producers on option, only both options had lapsed without anybody getting excited. So Steve had broken with his agent after one of those standard "To hell with Hollywood!" routines and retreated to the beach. Sometimes he thought he was going to write the Great American Novel. At other times, when the fog rolled in, he'd stand at the window and gaze down at the water, thinking how easy it would be to jump.

Then he met Jimmy Powers, and things got worse.

Jimmy Powers had a cottage right down the line from the one Steve had rented. He came rolling up four or five nights a week in a big new Buick convertible. He had a nice collection of Italian silk suits, but when he was at the beach

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he preferred to lounge around in matching shorts-and-shirts outfits, all of which had his initials monogrammed on the pockets. Often he came for the weekend, hauling a case of champagne in the trunk of the car. On such occasions Jimmy was usually accompanied by a stock-contract girl from the studio where he was employed as a public relations man.

The thing that got Steve down was the fact that Jimmy Powers (Buick, silk suits, monogrammed shirts, champagne and starlets) was only twenty-three.

"How does he do it?" Steve asked himself over and over. "The guy's got nothing on the ball. He can't write for sour apples. He's not even a good front man. It isn't charm, or personality, or good looks, or anything like that. What's his secret?"

But Jimmy Powers never talked about his work at the studio; and whenever Steve brought up the subject, he'd switch to another topic. But one evening, when both of them had half a load on, Steve tried again.

"How long you had this job, Jimmy?"

This time it worked.

"Almost three years."

"You mean you started when you were twenty? Just walked into one of the biggest outfits in the business and snagged a public relations job?"

"That's right."

"No previous experience? And right away they let you do promotion puffs on their top stars?"

"That's the way the ball bounced."

"I don't get it." Steve stared at him. "How does a guy fall into something like that?"

"Oh, it isn't so much, really," Jimmy told him. "Only three bills a week."

"*Only* three bills." Steve grunted. "For a kid like you? I've never come close to a steady three hundred a week, and I've knocked around the Industry for years. What gives, Jimmy? Level with me. Do you know where the body is buried?"

"Something like that," Jimmy answered. He gave Steve a kind of funny look and changed the subject, fast.

After that evening, Jimmy Powers wasn't very friendly any more. There were no further invitations to the handsomely furnished cottage. Then for about three weeks Jimmy stopped coming down to the beach altogether. By this time Steve was actually in production, grinding away at a book.

He was hard at it that evening in June when Jimmy Powers knocked on his door.

"Hi, sweetheart," he said. "Mind if I barge in?"

At first Steve thought Jimmy was drunk, but a double-take convinced him that the guy was just terribly excited. Powers paced up

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and down, snapping his fingers like a cornball juvenile in an expectant-father routine.

"Still writing the Great American Novel, huh?" Jimmy said. "Come off it, chum. Maybe I can steer you onto some real moola."

"Like three bills a week?" Steve asked.

"Peanuts. I'm talking about big money. The minute I hit this angle I thought of you."

"Very kind, I'm sure. What do I have to do—help you stick up the Bank of America?"

Jimmy ignored the gag. "You know where I just come from? M.P.'s office. That's right—for the last five hours, solid, I've been sitting in Mr. Big's office preaching the Word. Ended up with cart blank to handle the whole deal. Any way I want."

"What deal?"

Jimmy sat down then, and when he spoke again his voice was softer.

"You know what happened to Betsey Blake?" he asked.

Steve nodded. He knew what had happened to Betsey Blake, all right. Every man, woman, and child in the United States had been bombarded for the past two weeks with news reports about the Betsey Blake tragedy.

It had been one of those freak accidents. Betsey Blake, the Screen's Blonde Baby, the one and only Miss Mystery, was piloting her speedboat just outside Catalina Channel around twilight on the evening of June 2nd. According to the reports, she was preparing to enter the annual racing event the following Sunday, to try for her fourth straight win. Nobody knew just what had happened because there were no witnesses, but apparently her speedboat rammed into another boat head-on, killing a Mr. Louis Fryer of Pasadena. And herself.

Both boats had gone down immediately, and divers were still making half-hearted efforts to recover them from the deep water outside the choppy channel when, two days later, Fryer's body was washed up on a lonely beach. The next day Betsey Blake's corpse made a farewell appearance in the same place.

Betsey's identification took another few days to be established definitely enough to satisfy authorities, but there was no doubt about it. The Blonde Baby was no more.

It was a big story, because The Blonde Baby had been up there for a long time. The "Miss Mystery" tag had been pinned on her when she first rose to prominence in pictures, and she'd always lived up to it, taking unusual care to conceal her private life, which rumor had it was just one lurid escapade after another.

So the papers had had a field day digging up her past. They managed to ring in the name of virtually every important male star of the past twenty years. Some

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of the scandal sheets hinted that they could also mention the names of most of the studio set-dressers, gaffers, and truck-drivers over the same period.

"What happened?" Steve asked Powers. "Did your boss have a heart attack?"

Jimmy nodded. "Just about. Her death puts us on a real spot. The Friday before, she'd just finished her part in *Splendor*. Studio wrapped the picture up, four million bucks' worth of Technicolor, Super-Cinemascope, three top stars —the works. It's all finished, no more retakes, the sets are struck, the film is in the can. And then Betsey kicks off."

"So?"

"So? M.P. is sitting there with a very cold turkey. Sure, if he could push *Splendor* out to the exhibitors right away, maybe he could capitalize on the headlines a little. But this is our biggest picture for the year. We already set it up for late Fall release, around November, to catch the holiday trade and make a bid for the Awards. You begin to see the grief? Comes November, and Betsey Blake will be dead six months. By that time all the excitement is over. Who's going to plunk down a dollar-twenty to see somebody who's putting out free lunch to the worms? M.P. has to gross at least five million to break even. How's he going to do it? So for the past two weeks he's been nursing a real headache. Takes a lot of aspirin to cure a headache like that."

"But where do you come in?"

"With the U.S. Marines," Jimmy said. "Here M.P. and all the big wheels have been batting their brains out trying to come up with an angle—naturally, they had to junk the whole publicity campaign —and all they've got for their pains is sweat. Well, I got busy, and today I walked into M.P.'s office and laid five million potatoes right in his lap—maybe seven or eight."

"You found a solution?" Steve asked.

"Damned right I found a solution! It was sitting there staring them in the face all the time. I say it—right on M.P.'s wall. I walked over and pointed to the picture. That's all, brother."

"Picture on the wall?" Steve said. "Whose picture?"

Jimmy made with the dramatic pause.

"Valentino."

"Come again?"

"Rudolph Valentino. You've heard of him?"

"Sure I've heard of him."

"Yeah. Well, chances are you wouldn't have if some bright boy hadn't pulled the same stunt back in '26."

"What stunt?"

"Valentino went up like a skyrocket, but he was coming down fast. Then, just when he'd finished *The Son of the Sheik*— bingo! he gets appendicitis or something and

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croaks. So there the studio sits—with a dead star and a dead flicker. That's when some genius pulled a rabbit out of the hat."

Jimmy Powers snapped his fingers again. "They staged the most sensational funeral you ever saw. Poured out the puffs about the passing of the screen's Greatest Lover. Filled the newspapers, jammed the magazines, flooded the country with Valentino. Made out that all the dames who used to flip over him on the screen were soaking their handkerchiefs now that he was gone. By the time his picture was released they had everybody so hot to see it there was no holding them. The picture and the re-releases made so much dough that even the Valentino estate paid its debts and showed a profit. How did they do it? Women weeping at the grave, rumors cropping up that Rudy was still alive—publicity. Publicity—with a capital P."

Jimmy Powers grinned. "Well, I guess you get my angle. M.P. sure latched onto it! And I pointed out to him that we had an even better deal going for us. Because we had this Miss Mystery gimmick to play with, and a real mysterious death. We can even start a story that Betsey Blake is still alive—stuff like that."

"But she was positively identified—"

"I know, I know! So was Booth, and Mata Hari, and this Anasthesia dame, or whatever her name was, over in Russia. But the suckers go for that angle. *Is Betsey Blake Still Alive?* We plant articles in all the rags. Maybe even pony up some loot to get out special one-shots. *The Betsey Blake Magazine.* You know, like they did on this kid Presley, and a lot of others. Hire some kids to start Betsey Blake fan clubs. Get some of the high-priced talent to write sob stuff for the women's magazines. Like how Betsey Blake was a symbol of American girlhood."

"But she wasn't a symbol," Steve objected. "And she wasn't exactly a girl, either."

"Sure, sure, she was past forty. And I happen to know M.P. was going to axe her the minute her contract ran out. But she was well-preserved, you got to admit that, and a lot of the kids still went for her. We can build it up—yes sir, man, we can build it up!"

No doubt about it, Jimmy Powers was very excited. "And think of what we can do with her past! Nobody has dope on her real name, or just how she got started in show-biz back in the Thirties. Wait'll we get to work on *The Real Betsey Blake* and *The Betsey Blake Nobody Knows.*"

The excitement was contagious. In spite of himself Steve found himself saying, "Say, that's a possibility, isn't it? You might be able to uncover all sorts of things. Didn't I once hear a rumor that she'd had an illegitimate child

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by some producer? And that she was once married to—".

Jimmy Powers shook his head.

"No, that isn't the kind of stuff we want at all! You hear that stuff about everybody in the Industry. I'm giving strict orders to lay off any investigation, get me? We'll cook up our own stories. Make any kind of a past we want. Maybe get her mixed up with some of these mystic cults, you know what I mean. Hint foul play, too. Oh, we'll have a ball!"

"We? I thought this was just your baby."

"It is—M.P. gave me the green light all the way. But it's a big job, Steve. That's why I thought of you, sweetheart. You'd be a natural on this kind of promotion—doing some of the high-class stuff—like, say, for those women's rags I mentioned. So how's about it, Stevie-burger? How'd you like to be a great big legend-maker?"

Steve sat there for a moment without opening his mouth. And when finally he did open it, he had no idea what was going to come out.

"You know Betsey Blake when she was alive?" he asked.

"Of course I did. Handled most of her promotion—Stalzbuck was in charge, really, but I did a lot of the work. I thought you knew that."

"I wasn't sure." Steve hesitated. "What kind of person was she, really?"

Jimmy Powers shrugged. "An oddball. What difference does it make?"

"Was she friendly? Would you say she was a kind person?"

"In a way. Yes, she was. So why the District Attorney bit?"

"Because she's dead, Jimmy. Dead and gone, in a tragic accident. And the dead should be allowed to rest in peace. You can't just go and pitch a sideshow over her grave."

"Who says I can't?"

It was Steve's turn to shrug. "All right. I suppose you can. And nothing I say is going to stop you, is it?"

"Damned right it won't!"

Steve nodded. "Then go ahead. But, in the classic phrase, include me out. And thanks all the same. I can't be a ghoul."

Jimmy stared at him. "So I'm a ghoul, huh?" he muttered. "Well, I've got news for you. I'm a ghoul and you're a fool. A damned fool."

"Knock it off, please."

"Okay." Jimmy paused at the door. "You were always asking me what it takes to get along in this racket. Well, Stevie, it takes guts, that's what it takes. Guts to see your big opportunity when it comes along, and guts to follow through. Guts that you haven't got, Stevie-boy."

"Maybe I was brought up differently."

Jimmy laughed harshly. "You can say that again! Brother, if you

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only knew *how* differently! I got the perfect training for this particular job, believe me. And just you watch how I make good on it."

Then he was gone, and Steve tried to go back to work.

Jimmy stayed away from the beach for a long time—right through the height of the summer season. Steve figured he was working on his promotion, but there was no word from him.

Then the news started trickling in. The trickle became a stream, the stream became a flood.

The Betsey Blake legend burst open the American public during the latter part of August. By September the first magazines hit the stands, carrying their planted stories. By October the specials were out, the fan clubs were formed, and the television people were combing their files for old kinescopes of Betsey Blake's few live shows.

The whole thing was just as Jimmy Powers had outlined it, only more so. *I Was Betsey Blake's Last Date* vied for attention with *The Loves of Betsey*. And there was *The Truth About*—, and *The Real*—, and *What They Don't Dare Print About*—, and a hundred others. The studio, meanwhile, was doing an indefatigable job tying in *Splendor*. Betsey Blake in her last and greatest performance! The greatest actress of the American screen!

On a different level there was the *Betsey Blake—The Woman Nobody Knew* approach. In this series it was possible to learn that Betsey Blake had herself been the daughter of a reigning celebrity of the silent screen, or of royal European blood, or merely a youngster out of Hollywood High School who deliberately set out to fashion a career for herself.

There were as many, and as conflicting, details as to her love life. And there was much speculation about why she had maintained such an air of secrecy concerning her personal affairs. She was a devout churchgoer, she was a freethinker, she was a secret Satanist, she dabbled in astrology, she attended Voodoo ceremonies in Haiti, she was really an old woman who had discovered the secret of eternal youth. She was secretly an intellectual and her lovers included most of the celebrated literary figures of our generation; she was actually a shy, sensitive person who couldn't face her own image on the screen; she was a devoted student of the drama who had planned to retire from the screen and establish her own repertory theater. She loved children and wanted to adopt half a dozen, she had been jilted as a girl and still cherished the memory of her one real love, she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and spent all her money on psychiatrists.

All this, and much more, could

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be learned by any reader during early fall.

But Jimmy Powers had prophesied correctly when he said that the mystery angle would prove to be the most attractive part of the legend. There was the *Betsey Blake Did Not Die!* theory, which played up the "strange circumstances" surrounding the case, the "unexplained disappearance" of the two boats, the "reluctance" of the studio to exhibit the body in a public funeral. This angle fastened on every conceivable circumstance, real or rumored, which could be offered as "proof."

As November approached, the volume and tempo of the articles neared a crescendo. For now the Betsey Blake legend was public property, and the fake fan clubs had given way to real fan clubs. Some of the scandal rags were printing the "inside story" and the "real lowdown"—Betsey Blake had been a tramp, she had been an alcoholic, she had started out posing for "art studies" and worse—but none of these allegations affected the legend. Rather, they served to strengthen it. To her growing army of devotees came the teenagers, and that was the final victory. Everyone from eight to eighty was breathlessly awaiting the advent of *Splendor* on their local screens.

It was early one night in November, as Steve sat typing the second draft of his novel, that Jimmy Powers reappeared.

Once again he hailed Steve from the doorway, and once again Steve thought he might be drunk.

This time, however, he had more grounds for his suspicion, because as Jimmy entered the room he brought an alcoholic aura with him.

"How ya doing, boy?" he shouted.

Steve started to tell him, but Powers wasn't really listening.

"Guess I don't have to tell you how I'm doing," he exclaimed. "We open nation-wide next week. Nation-wide, get me? No previews, no test spots, no New York first run—just solid bookings straight across the board. Every key city, and the highest percentage of the gross we ever sold a picture for! And who did it, Stevie-burger? Me, that's who."

Steve lit a cigarette to avoid having to make any comment.

"And don't think the Industry doesn't know it! Man, are the offers pouring in. Of course, M.P.'s a smart old buzzard—he's not going to let me get away from him. Two grand a week, five years noncancellable, and that's not all. When the pic opens I get a bonus. Fifty Gs under the table. You imagine that? Fifty Gs, cash, that nobody will ever know about. No taxes, nothing. Let me tell you, M.P. knows how to make a gesture. Of course, it's worth it to

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him. I been sweating blood on this thing, Stevie. Nobody will ever know the throats I had to cut—"

"Don't tell me," Steve said.

"Still playing it simon-pure, huh? Well, that's okay by me, no hard feelings. I just wanted you to know what you missed out on, sweetheart. This was the biggest coup of the century."

"You can say that again."

Both Jimmy Powers and Steve stared at the woman in the doorway. She was short, brown-haired, and plump enough to fill out the rather bedraggled slacks-and-sweater combination she was wearing. Her feet were bare, and she had some difficulty balancing on them, because she was obviously tight as a tick.

"What the hell—?" Jimmy began as she weaved toward him with a smirk.

"Saw you leave your shack just as I came along," she said. "So I just sneaked in there by myself and had a little drinkie. I could hear you talking over here, so I thought why not come over and join the party?"

"Mind telling me who you are?" Steve asked, a premonition growing in him.

The woman grinned and pointed at Jimmy Powers. "Ask him," she said.

Jimmy Powers just stood there, his face going from red to white.

"No," he said. "No, it isn't—it can't be—"

"The hell it isn't," said the woman. "You know better than to try and get away with that."

"But what happened? Where have you been?"

"Took myself a little trip." The woman giggled. "It's kind of a long sh-story." She turned to Steve. "Got anything to drink?"

Before Steve could answer, Jimmy stepped forward. "You've had enough," he said. "Tell your story and make it fast."

"All right, all right, hold your horses." The woman flopped into an armchair and for a moment stared at the floor.

"I saw the papers, of course," she said. "They got it all wrong."

"Then why didn't you do something?" Jimmy growled.

"Because I was on a trip, remember? I mean I saw them all right, but they were a couple of months old." She paused. "You going to let me tell this my way?"

"Go ahead."

"Sure, I cracked into this other boat, like they said. Damn thing running without a light, motor throttled down so's I never heard a thing. This Louis Fryer was on board, like they said—I knew old Louie from 'way back. What the papers didn't know, of course, is that he wasn't alone. He must have picked up some tramp off the beach, some blonde floozy hanging around the Yacht Club. Anyway, when we hit she got it, too. At least that's the way it fig-

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ures. She got it and when her body came up they identified her as me."

"And what happened to—?"

"I'm coming to that part. I passed out, I guess. But I had sense enough to hang onto the boat."

"The boat went down. They never found it."

"The boat didn't go down. And the reason they never found it was that it got picked up that night. With me with it. Little Mexican freighter spotted us just outside the channel and hauled us on board. Me and the boat. I was out cold—guess I had a concussion. When I came to, I was on my way to Chile."

"Chile?"

The woman nodded. "Sure, Chile. That's in South America, you know? Valparaiso, Santiago—we went everywhere. Those little wildcat freighters, they take their own good-natured time when they make a trip. Besides, I sold the boat down there for a good price. Made enough to pay my way and plenty left over for tequila. Captain was a good friend of mine. Whole crew, for that matter. You see, they didn't ever catch on to who I was. All they could see was a blonde. At least, after I got another bottle of rinse and touched it up a bit." The woman gestured toward her tousled hair. "You know how they flip for a blonde." She giggled again.

Jimmy Powers stood up. "You mean to tell me you've spent the last five months helling around on a freighter with a bunch of Mex grease-monkeys?" he shouted.

"And why not? First real vacation I've had in years. And believe me, it was one long party. When I found out in Santiago what the score was, I thought the hell with it, let 'em suffer. This was my big chance to get off the hook for a while and live a little. So I lived. But we ran out of cash, the Captain and I, so when we docked at Long Beach today I came ashore. I knew M.P. would blow his stack if I walked in on him cold. I figured I'd see you first. Maybe we can cook up a publicity angle together, so when we hit M.P. he won't go through the roof."

The woman turned to Steve. "You sure you haven't got a drinkie?" she asked. "Jeez, look at my hair. Got to get to a beauty parlor right away. Nobody'd recognize me. Isn't that right, pal? Go ahead, admit it—you didn't recognize me either at first, did you? Gained fifteen pounds, hair grown out. And next week the picture opens—"

"That's right," Jimmy Powers said. "Next week the picture opens."

The woman stood up, swaying. "One thing I got to hand you," she said. "You did a wonderful promotion job. Even in Chile they knew all about it. And when I hit town today, first thing I did was

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hike over to the magazine racks. There I am, all over the place. A wonnerful job."

"Yeah," said Jimmy.

"Well, don't just stand there. Now you gotta do even a more wonnerful job. Because I'm back. That's the real topper, isn't it? Wait until this one hits the good old public!"

"Yeah," said Jimmy.

"Of course, this time I'll be around to help you. I got a line all cooked up. The Captain, he won't do any talking—he's shoving off again for Mexico tomorrow morning. We can handle it any way we like. Hah, I can just see the look on the face of old Louie Fryer's wife when she finds out he had a blonde on board! But it's a *wonnerful* story. It'll be a big needle for the picture."

"Yeah," said Jimmy.

She turned away and faced Steve again. "How about that drinkie, lover-boy?"

"I'll give you a drink," Jimmy Powers said. "Over at my place. Come along now."

"Betcha."

He placed his arm around the woman and guided her toward the door. Then he paused and looked at Steve. "Stick around, will you?" he said. "I want to talk to you later."

Steve nodded.

He saw them disappear into Jimmy's cabin. It was the only other cottage with lights on all along the beach—November is off-season.

He could even have listened and caught some of their conversation. But Steve couldn't concentrate. He was too busy calling himself names.

Was this the woman he'd been too noble to help turn into a legend? Was her reputation worth protecting at the sacrifice of his own future? Jimmy had been right—the trouble with him was he had no guts. His chance had come and he'd muffed it. For what?

Steve was too wrapped up in name calling to notice what time it was Jimmy and the woman left. When he finally glanced across the way he saw that the lights of the cottage had gone out.

Jimmy Powers had said he was coming back. Where was he? Steve started for the door. He was quite sure Jimmy hadn't driven away, because he would have heard the sound of the car.

Just then Jimmy came stumbling up the walk. He seemed to have taken on quite a bit more to drink.

Steve said, "What's the matter? Where's Betsey Blake?"

"Who?" Jimmy staggered in the doorway, then steadied himself against the side of the screen. "You mean the old bat who barged in here? I hope you didn't go for that line of malarkey she tried to hand out."

"But it figures, Jimmy. You can check up on it—"

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"I don't have to. When I got her over to my place I started asking a few questions and she broke down. She was just running a bluff—made the whole thing up. She's no more Betsey Blake than you are."

"What!"

Jimmy Powers wiped his forehead. "I think she was figuring on a shakedown. You know—come out with the story just before the picture's set to break, and threaten to queer the works unless the studio pays off." He shook his head. "Anyway, it doesn't matter, now."

"You scared her off?"

"No." Jimmy gulped. "Don't get me wrong, pal. Nobody *scared* her. She just left of her own free will, and under her own steam. You got to get that straight, see? Because I—I think there's been sort of an accident."

"Accident?"

Steve stiffened, and Jimmy went limp.

"I'm not sure yet. That's why I came over. I wanted you to come with me and look—"

"Look at what? Where is she?"

"Well, you must have noticed, she was crocked, wasn't she? I happened to be at the back window after she left, and I saw her stumbling along the edge of the cliff, like. I was all set to holler at her—listen to what I'm telling you, Stevie-boy, you got to get this—I was all set to holler at her when she sort of fell. Bingo, like that, she's gone."

"You mean she . . . But that's a sixty-foot drop!"

Jimmy gulped again. "I know. I haven't looked. I'm afraid to, alone."

"We'd better call the cops," Steve said.

"Yeah, sure. But I wanted to talk to you first. Alone, see? I mean, we call them, right away they'll ask a lot of questions. Who was she, where did she come from, what did she want around here? You know cops."

"Tell them the truth."

"And queer the picture?"

"But you say she wasn't Betsey Blake."

"She wasn't, but the minute they find out she *claimed* to be, the whole campaign is in the soup. Don't you understand, Steve? People will start wondering—was she or wasn't she? I worked my tail off building up a legend, and now it can all tumble down just because some dizzy old bag takes a header off a cliff."

Steve tried to get Jimmy Powers to meet his stare, but the bloodshot eyes kept rolling. "What I mean to say," he was muttering, "is why not just forget the whole thing?"

"But we've got to notify the authorities. Who knows? She may still be alive down there." Steve started for the phone.

"I know, I know. You got to tell

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them. But she isn't alive, she couldn't be. And all I want is that you don't say anything about her coming here tonight. Or that she said anything. Make believe it never happened. I just looked out the window before I went to bed and I noticed this beach bum stagger over the edge. That's the way it was. No harm done, is there, Steve? I mean, look at all that's at stake."

"I'm looking," Steve said. "And I'll think about it." He went to the phone and dialed. "Hello, get me police headquarters. I want to report an accident . . ."

He didn't waste words. No details—a woman had apparently fallen over the cliff, such-and-such an address; yes, he'd be waiting for them.

When Steve hung up, the publicity man expelled his breath in a deep sigh.

"That's the way to do it," he said. "You handled it just right. I won't forget you, Stevie-boy."

"I'm still thinking," Steve said. "When they get here I'll make up my mind what to say."

"Now, listen—"

"You listen to me. What makes you so sure that woman wasn't who she claimed to be? No, don't give me that blackmail argument again. Nobody gets drunk when they're out to pull a shakedown." He walked over to Jimmy Powers. "Let me ask you another question. Suppose she really was Betsey Blake. Then what? Why couldn't you have made the announcement tomorrow, the way she said? Think of the sensation it would have made, what it would have done for the picture."

Jimmy drew back against the door. "To hell with the picture," he said. "It's me I'm thinking about. Don't you understand that, meat-head? This is *my* promotion, mine all the way. I cooked it up. I nursed it. It's my baby, and everybody in this town knows it. The picture's gonna be a smash, and who gets the credit? Me, that's who.

"Figure it your way and see what happens. So she breaks the story, and there's a sensation all right. Maybe even a bigger sensation, a real sockeroo. But it's not going to do the picture any more good—we've got it made already, just the way it is. And so Betsey Blake turns up alive, then what? She's still an old bag—she can't play leads any more, not even if they photograph her through a scrim to take the wrinkles out. Alive, she's just a middle-aged tramp who hits the sauce. Dead, she's a legend. She's right up there with Valentino and Harlow and James Dean. Her old pictures are worth a fortune in re-run rights. I tell you, it adds up!

"Besides, if she breaks the story, what happens to me? I'm the fair-haired boy right now. But if she tops me, then she gets the credit.

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You heard her say it yourself, how 'we' were gonna figure out an angle together. I know that 'together' line from way back! She'd take all the bows, steal all the scenes. Believe me, Steve, I know! She was always like that, couldn't stand to have anyone else share the spot with her. It was Betsey Blake, first, last, and always. The things she pulled with me personally! I would have rotted in the publicity department the rest of my life if this break hadn't come along. You don't get this kind of a chance often out here, Steve. I took it, and I worked on it, and nobody's gonna grab it away from me at the last minute. I wouldn't let her—"

Steve put his hand on the man's shoulder. "You told me what I wanted to know," he said. "She *was* Betsey Blake, wasn't she?"

"I ain't saying. And you don't have to say anything either, when the cops come. I mean, Steve, have a heart—what good can it do now? You don't know anything about it, that's all you tell 'em. I've got five grand I can bring over here tomorrow morning. Five grand in cash that says you don't know anything. Hell, ten grand. And a job at the studio—"

"So she was Betsey Blake," Steve murmured. "And she just walked out of your place and fell off the cliff."

"Those things happen, you know how it is, a drunk dame and her foot slips. It was an accident, I swear it was! All right, if you must know, I was with her—I didn't want to tell you that part. I was with her, I was going to drive her home, and then she let go of my arm and stumbled off."

"There'll be footprints in the sand," Steve said. "And they'll check anyway, they always do. They'll find out who she really is, and they'll investigate from start to finish. They'll go all the way back—"

Jimmy Powers wilted. Steve had to hold him up.

"I never figured," he said. "Sure, they'll go all the way back."

"You shouldn't have killed her."

"Don't say that, Stevie!"

"It's true, isn't it? You did kill her. You knew she was Betsey Blake, but you killed her anyway, because you thought she'd queer your big deal."

Jimmy didn't answer. Instead he hit out at Steve, and Steve twisted and brought up his arm. Jimmy sagged. Steve held him there, listening for the sound of a siren in the distance.

"Fifty grand," Jimmy whispered. "I told you I had it coming. Fifty grand, all in cash. Nobody'd ever know."

Steve sighed. "When I heard about the money I was ready to kick myself," he said. "I thought I was a sucker because I didn't have your kind of guts. But now I know what it means to have

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them. It means you don't stop at anything, not even killing."

"You don't understand," Jimmy whimpered. "I wanted to live it up, I wanted my chance to be a big shot. She never gave it to me while she was alive, and when she disappeared I thought my big break had finally come. But what's the use now? Like you say, they'll find out sooner or later. I ought to have doped it out. I couldn't get away with it. And now it'll kill the legend, too."

"Never mind the legend," Steve said. "You killed a woman." The sirens were close now; he could hear the tires squealing to a halt. "I guess I don't understand at that," Steve said. "I don't understand your breed of rat at all. Call yourself a big-shot publicity man, do you? Why, you'd murder your own mother for a story."

Jimmy Powers gave him a funny look as the cops came in. "That's right," he whispered. "How'd you guess?"

"Q"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ELLERY QUEEN**

TITLE: ***Object Lesson***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Ellery Queen

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The third of Ellery's battles with contemporary problems: the lack of schoolrooms—and how overcrowded classes may contribute to juvenile delinquency . . . One of the most important cases in Ellery's career.*

ELLERY HURRIED DOWN WEST 92ND Street toward the main entrance of Henry Hudson High School stealing guilty glances at his watch. Miss Carpenter had been crisply specific about place, date, and time: her home room, 109; Friday morning, April 22nd; first period ("Bell *at 8:40,* Mr. Queen"). Miss Carpenter, who had come to him with an unusual request, had struck him as the sort of dedicated young person who would not take kindly to a hitch in her crusade.

Ellery broke into an undignified lope.

The project for which she had enlisted his aid was formidable even for a crusading young teacher of Social Studies on the 9th Grade Junior High level. For two months merchants of the neighborhood had been reporting stores broken into by a teen-age gang. Beyond establishing that the crimes were the work of the same boys, who were probably students at Henry Hudson High School, the police had got nowhere.

Miss Carpenter, walking home from a movie late the previous Monday night, had seen three boys dive out of a smashed bakery window and vanish into an alley. She

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had recognized them as Howard Ruffo, David Strager, and Joey Buell, all 15-year-old homeroom students of hers. The juvenile crime problem was solved.

But not for Miss Carpenter. Instead of going to the police, Miss Carpenter had gone to Ellery, who lived on West 87th Street and was a hero to the youth of the neighborhood. Howard, David, and Joey were *not* hardened delinquents, she had told him, and she could *not* see their arrest, trial, and imprisonment as the solution to anything. True, they had substituted gang loyalty for the love and security they were denied in their unhappy slum homes, but boys who worked at after-school jobs and turned every cent in at home were hardly beyond recall, were they? And she had told him just where each boy worked, and at what.

"They're only patterning their behavior after criminals because they think criminals are strong, successful, and glamorous," Miss Carpenter had said; and what she would like him to do was visit her class and, under the pretext of giving a talk on the subject of Notorious Criminals I Have Known, paint such a picture of weak, ratting, empty, and violently ending criminality that David and Joey and Howard would see the error of their ways.

It had seemed to Ellery that this placed a rather hefty burden on his oratorical powers. Did Miss Carpenter have her principal's permission for this project?

No, Miss Carpenter had replied bravely, she did *not* have Mr. Hinsdale's permission, and she might very well lose her job when he heard about it. "But I'm *not* going to be the one who gives those boys the first shove toward reform school and maybe eventually the electric chair!" And besides, what did Mr. Queen have to lose but an hour of his time?

So Mr. Queen had feebly said yes, he would come; and here he was, at the door of the determined young woman's classroom . . . seven minutes *late*.

Ellery braced himself and opened the door.

The moment he set foot in the room he knew he had walked in on a catastrophe.

Louise Carpenter stood tensely straight at her desk, her pretty face almost as white as the envelope she was clutching. And she was glaring at a mass of boy and girl faces so blankly, so furtively quiet that the silence sizzled.

The first thing she said to him was, "I've been robbed."

The terrible mass of boy and girl eyes followed him to her desk. In his nose was the pungent smell of ink, glue, paper, chalk, musty wardrobe closets; surrounding him were discolored walls, peeling paint, tarnished fixtures, warped

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window poles, and mutilated desks.

"Robbed in my own classroom," Miss Carpenter choked.

He laid his coat and hat gently on her desk. "A practical joke?" He smiled at the class.

"Hardly. They didn't know you were coming." They had betrayed her, the sick shock in her voice said. "Class, this is Ellery Queen. I don't have to tell you who Mr. Queen is, and how honored we are to have him visit us." There was a gasp, a buzz, a spatter of applause. "Mr. Queen was kind enough to come here today as a special treat to give us a talk on crime. I didn't know he was going to walk in on one."

The spatter stopped dead.

"You're sure there has been a crime, Miss Carpenter?"

"An envelope with seven one-dollar bills in it was stolen, and from the way it happened the thief can only be someone in this room."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

He deliberately looked them over, wondering which of the 41 pairs of eyes staring back at his belonged to Joey Buell, Howard Ruffo, and David Strager. He should have asked Louise Carpenter to describe them. Now it was too late.

Or was it?

It seemed to Ellery that three of the 20-odd boy faces were rather too elaborately blank. One of them was set on husky shoulders; this boy was blond, handsome, and dead-white about the nostrils. The second was a sharp-nosed, jet-haired boy with Mediterranean coloring who was perfectly still except for his fingers, and they kept turning a pencil over and over almost ritually. The third, thin and red-haired, showed no life anywhere except in a frightened artery in his temple.

Ellery made up his mind.

"Well, if it's a real live crime," he said, turning to Louise, "I don't imagine anyone wants to hear me ramble on about crimes that are dead and buried. In fact, I think it would be more interesting if I gave the class a demonstration of how a crime is actually solved. What do you think, Miss Carpenter?"

Understanding leaped into her eyes, along with hope.

"I think," she said grimly, "it would be *lots* more interesting."

"Suppose we begin by finding out about the seven dollars. They were yours, Miss Carpenter?"

"One dollar was mine. Miss McDoud, an English teacher, is being married next month. A group of us are chipping in to buy her a wedding present, with me as banker. All this week teachers have been dropping in to leave their dollars in an envelope I've had on my desk. This morning—"

"That's fine for background, Miss Carpenter. Suppose we hear testimony from the class." Ellery surveyed them, and there was a

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ripple of tittering. Suddenly he pointed to a little lipsticked girl with an Italian haircut. "Would you like to tell us what happened this morning?"

"I don't know anything about the money!"

"Chicken." A boy's jeering voice.

"The boy who said that." Ellery kept his tone friendly. It was one of the three he had spotted, the husky blond one. "What's your name, son?"

"David Strager." His sneer said, *You don't scare me.* But his nostrils remained dead-white. He was the boy Miss Carpenter had said worked after school as a stock boy at the Hi-Kwality Supermarket on Amsterdam Avenue.

"All right, Dave. You tell us about this morning."

The boy glanced scornfully at the girl with the Italian haircut. "We all knew the money was in the envelope. This morning before the bell rings Mrs. Morrell comes in with her buck and Miss Carpenter puts it with the other money and lays the envelope on her desk. So afterward the bell rings, Mrs. Morrell beats it out, Miss Carpenter picks up the envelope and takes a look inside, and she hollers, 'I been robbed.'"

The thin boy with the red hair called out, "So what are we supposed to do, drop dead?" and winked at David Strager, who had already sat down. The big blond boy winked back.

"And your name?" Ellery asked the redhead.

"Joseph Buell," the boy answered defiantly. He was the one who worked at Kaplan's, the big cigar, candy, and stationery store on 89th Street. "Who wants their old seven bucks?"

"Somebody not only wants it, Joey, somebody's got it."

"Aaa, for all we know she took it herself." And this was the third of the trio, the sharp-faced dark boy. If Ellery was right, he was the one who delivered part-time for O'Donnel's Dry Cleaning on Columbus Avenue.

"And you are—?"

"Howard Ruffo."

The Three Musketeers, rushing to one another's support.

"You mean, Howard, you're charging Miss Carpenter with having stolen the teachers' money?" Ellery asked with a smile.

The boy's dark glance wavered. "I mean maybe she took it like by mistake. Mislaid it or somepin'."

"As a matter of fact," came Louise's quiet voice, "when I saw the money wasn't in the envelope, my first thought was exactly that, Mr. Queen. So I searched myself thoroughly."

"May I see the envelope?"

"This isn't the one I was keeping the seven dollars in—" she handed him the envelope—"though it looks the same. I have a box of them in my locker there. The lock hasn't worked for ages.

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This one must have been stolen from my locker yesterday, or earlier this week."

"It's a blank envelope, Miss Carpenter. How do you know it isn't the one that contained the money?"

"Because the original had a notation in ink on the flap—*Gift Fund for Helen McDoud.*" She looked about and glances fell in windrows. "So this theft was planned, Mr. Queen. Someone came to class this morning armed with this duplicate envelope, previously stolen and filled with worthless paper, prepared to make a quick exchange if the opportunity arose. And it did. The class was milling around while Mrs. Morrell and I chatted."

The paper in the substitute envelope consisted of a sheaf of rectangular strips cut to the size of dollar bills.

"At the time you placed Mrs. Morrell's dollar among the others in the original envelope, was everybody here?"

"Yes. The door opened and closed only once after that—when Mrs. Morrell left. I was facing the door the whole time."

"Could Mrs. Morrell, as a practical joke, have made the switch?"

"She wasn't anywhere near my desk after I laid the envelope on it."

"Then you're right, Miss Carpenter. The theft was planned in advance by one of the boys or girls in this room, and the thief—and money—are both still here."

The tension was building beautifully. The boy must be in a sweat. He hadn't expected his theft to be found out so soon, before he got a chance to sneak the money out of the room.

"What time does the first period end, Miss Carpenter?"

"At 9:35."

Every head turned toward the clock on the wall.

"And it's only 8:56." Ellery said cheerfully. "That gives us thirty-nine minutes—more than enough time. Unless the boy or girl who planned this crime wants to return the loot to Miss Carpenter here and now?"

This time he stared directly from David to Howard to Joey. His stare said, *I hate to do this, boys, but of course I'll have to if you think you can get away with it.*

The Strager boy's full lips were twisted. The skinny redhead, Joey Buell, stared back sullenly. Howard Ruffo's pencil twirled faster.

It's one of those three, all right.

"I see we'll have to do it the hard way," Ellery said. "Sorry I can't produce the thief with a flick of my wrist, the way it's done in books, but in real life, detection—like crime—is pretty unexciting stuff. We'll begin with a body search. It's voluntary, by the way. Anybody rather not chance a search? Raise your hand."

Not a muscle moved.

"I'll search the boys, Miss Car-

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penter. You roll those two bulletin boards over to that corner and search the girls."

The next few minutes were noisy. As each boy was searched and released he was sent to the blackboard at the front of the room. The girls were sent to the rear.

"Find anything, Miss Carpenter?"

"Rose Perez has a single dollar bill. The other girls either have small change or no money at all."

"No sign of the original envelope?"

"No."

"I found two boys with bills—in each case a single, too. David Strager and Joey Buell. No envelope."

Louise's brows met.

Ellery glanced up at the clock. 9:07.

He strolled over to her. "Don't show them you're worried. There's nothing to worry about. We have twenty-eight minutes." He raised his voice, smiling. "Naturally the thief has ditched the money, hoping to recover it when the coast is clear. It's therefore hidden somewhere in the classroom. All right, Miss Carpenter, we'll take the desks and seats first. Look under them too—chewing gum makes a handy adhesive. Eh, class?"

Four minutes later they looked at each other, then up at the clock. 9:11.

Exactly 24 minutes remaining.

"Well," said Ellery.

He began to ransack the room. Books, radiators, closets, lunchbags, schoolbags. Bulletin boards, wall maps, the terrestrial globe. The UN poster, the steel engravings of Washington and Lincoln. He even emptied Louise's three pots of geraniums and sifted the earth.

His eyes kept returning to the clock more and more often.

Ellery searched everything in the room, from the socket of the American flag to the insect-filled bowls of the old light fixtures, reached by standing on desks.

Everything.

"It's not here!" whispered Louise in his ear.

The Buell, Ruffo, and Strager boys were nudging one another, grinning.

"Well, well," Ellery said.

Interesting. Something of a problem at that.

Of course! He got up and checked two things he had missed —the cup of the pencil sharpener and the grid covering the loudspeaker of the PA system. No envelope. No money.

He took out a handkerchief and wiped his neck.

Really it's a little silly. A schoolboy!

Ellery glanced at the clock. 9:29.

Six minutes left, in which not only to find the money but identify the thief!

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He leaned against Louise's desk, forcing himself to relax.

It was these "simple" problems. Nothing big and important like murder, blackmail, bank robbery. A miserable seven dollars lifted by a teen-age delinquent in an overcrowded classroom . . .

He thought furiously.

Let the bell ring at 9:35 and the boy strut out of Miss Carpenter's room undetected, with his loot, and he would send up a howl like a wolf cub over his first kill. *Who says these big-shot law jerks ain't monkeys? The biggest! He's a lot of nothin'. Wind. See me stand him on his ear? And this is just for openers. Wait till I get goin' for real, not any of this kid stuff . . .*

No, nothing big and important like murder. Just seven dollars, and a big shot to laugh at. Not important? Ellery nibbled his lip. It was probably the most important case of his career.

9:30½.

Only four and a half minutes left!

Louise Carpenter was gripping a desk, her knuckles white. Waiting to be let down.

Ellery pushed away from the desk and reached into the patch pocket of his tweed jacket for his pipe and tobacco, thinking harder about Helen McDoud's seven dollar gift fund than he had ever thought about anything in his life.

And as he thought . . .

At 9:32 he was intently examining the rectangles of paper the thief had put into the substitute envelope. The paper was ordinary cheap newsprint, scissored to dollar-bill size out of a colored comics section. He shuffled through the dummy dollars one by one, hunting for something. Anything!

The 41 boys and girls were buzzing and giggling now.

Ellery pounced. Clinging to one of the rectangles was a needle-thin sliver of paper about an inch long, a sort of paper shaving. He fingered it, held it up to the light. It was not newsprint. Too full-bodied, too tough-textured . . .

Then he knew what it must be.

Less than two minutes left.

Feverishly he went through the remaining dollar-sized strips of comic paper.

And there it was. There it was!

This strip had been cut from the top of the comic sheet. On the margin appeared the name of a New York newspaper and the date *April 24, 1955.*

Think it over. Take your time. Lots of seconds in a minute.

The buzzing and giggling had died. Louise Carpenter was on her feet, looking at him imploringly.

A bell began clanging in the corridor.

First period over.

9:35.

Ellery rose and said solemnly, "The case is solved."

With the room cleared and the

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door locked, the three boys stood backed against the blackboard as if facing a firing squad. The bloom was gone from David Strager's cheeks. The blood vessel in Joey Buell's temple was trying to wriggle into his red hair. And Howard Ruffo's eyes were liquid with panic.

It's hard to be fifteen years old and trapped.

But harder not to be.

"Wha'd I do?" whimpered Howard Ruffo. "I didn't do nothin'."

"We didn't take Miss Carpenter's seven dollars," said David Strager, stiff-lipped.

"Can you say the same about Mr. Mueller's baked goods last Monday night, Dave?" Ellery paused gently. "Or any of the other things you boys have been making love to in the past two months?"

He thought they were going to faint.

"But this morning's little job," Ellery turned suddenly to the red-haired boy, "you pulled by yourself, Joey."

The thin body quivered. "Who, me?"

"Yes, Joey, you."

"You got rocks in your skull," Joey whispered. "Not me!"

"I'll prove it, Joey. Hand me the dollar bill I found in your jeans when I searched you."

"That's my dollar!"

"I know it, Joey. I'll give you another for it. Hand it over . . . Miss Carpenter."

"Yes, Mr. Queen!"

"To cut these strips of newspaper to the same size as dollar bills, the thief must have used a real bill as a pattern. If he cut too close, the scissors would shave off a sliver of the bill." Ellery handed her Joey's dollar. "See if this bill shows a slight indentation along one edge."

"It does!"

"And I found this sliver clinging to one of the dummies. Fit the sliver to the indented edge of Joey's bill. If Joey is guilty, it should fit exactly. Does it?"

Louise looked at the boy. "Joey, it does fit."

David and Howard were gaping at Ellery.

"What a break," Joey choked.

"Criminals make their own bad breaks, Joey. The thing inside you that told you you were doing wrong made your hand shake as you cut. But even if your hand hadn't slipped, I'd have known you were the one who substituted the strips of paper for the money."

"How? How could you?" It was a cry of bewilderment.

Ellery showed him the rectangular strip with the white margin. "See this, Joey? Here's the name of the newspaper, and the date is *April 24, 1955*. What date is today?"

"Friday the 22nd . . ."

"Friday, April 22nd. But these strips of colored comics come from the newspaper of April 24th, Joey

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—*this coming Sunday's paper*. Who gets advance copies of the Sunday comics? Stores that sell newspapers in quantity. Getting the bulldog editions in advance gives them a jump on the Sunday morning rush, when they have to insert the news sections.

"Nothing to it, Joey. Which of you three boys had access before this morning to next Sunday's bulldog editions? Not David—he works in a supermarket. Not Howard—he works for a dry cleaner. But you work in a big cigar and stationery store, Joey, where newspapers must be one of the stock items."

Joey Buell's eyes glassed over.

"We think we're strong, Joey, and then we run into somebody stronger," Ellery said. "We think we're the smartest, and someone comes along to outsmart us. We beat the rap a dozen times, but the thirteenth time the rap beats us. You can't win, Joey."

Joey burst into tears.

Louise Carpenter made an instinctive gesture toward him. Ellery's head-shake warned her back. He went close to the boy and tousled the red head, murmuring something the others could not hear. And after a while Joey's tears sniffled to an end and he wiped his eyes on his sleeve in a puzzled way.

"Because I think this is going to work out all right, Joey," Ellery said, continuing their curious colloquy aloud. "We'll have a session with Mr. Hinsdale, and then with some pretty right guys I happen to know at Police Headquarters. After that it will be up to you."

Joey Buell gulped. "Okay, Mr. Queen." He did not look at his two friends.

David and Howard communicated silently. Then David turned to Ellery. "Where do we stand, Mr. Queen?"

"You and Howard are coming along."

The blond boy bit his lip. Then he nodded, and after a moment the dark boy nodded, too.

"Oh, I almost forgot." Ellery dipped briskly into the jacket pocket that held his pipe and tobacco. His hand reappeared with a wrinkled envelope, its flap written over. From the envelope protruded the corners of some one-dollar bills. "Your Helen McDoud wedding gift fund, Miss Carpenter. With Joey's compliments."

"I did forget!" gasped Louise. "Where did you find it?"

"Where Joey in desperation slipped it as I was frisking the other boys. The only thing in the room I didn't think of searching —my own pocket." Ellery winked at the three boys. "Coming fellas?"

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THE DRAMATIC DEATHS OF DR. KANG

DEATH IN MOROCCO

by VICTOR CANNING

IT WAS COOL ON THE HOTEL VERANDAH. The fans made a gentle noise as they swung round and round, water sparkled from a little fountain in the garden, and beyond the white, flat-topped houses the Red Sea stretched away under the noon sun like a sheet of beaten brass. Listening to the girl talk, Dr. Kang reflected that the stupidity of some women was a bottomless well. He sat there, a plump, broad-faced man nearing his middle forties, wearing a well-cut silk suit—a man of bearing and presence. Behind his thick-lensed glasses, which he had recently taken to wearing, his dark eyes never left the girl's face.

"So when this job was offered to me I jumped at it. After the death of my father I was all alone and I had to find something to do."

English and attractive, a swan to send any hunter's hand to his bow, thought Dr. Kang . . . but with as much understanding of the ways of the world as a young goose.

"It is wise to consider before one jumps," said Dr. Kang, and he frowned a little so that for a moment his face was Buddha-like and severe. "I know this Monsieur Charap who has brought you here. He is, indeed, an agent of the Emir of Debussa. It is true that the Emir has a palace fifty miles from here and that he has daughters."

"Then you agree, it's a wonderful job? I've always had an itch to travel, to see the world."

Dr. Kang sighed gently. At the moment he had no love for the Emir of Debussa, through whom he had recently lost money on an illicit arms deal. It would be some compensation, he decided, to spoil at least one of the Emir's pleasures.

"He has daughters, yes. But that they need an English governess . . . Well, quite frankly, young lady, you have much to learn."

"But I don't understand—"

"It is not difficult. Four or five times a year Monsieur Charap arrives here at Port Rabat with governesses for the Emir's daughters. French, Portuguese, Italian . . . his daughters must have a command, mademoiselle, of more languages than my illustrious self. You understand now?"

The girl was suddenly embarrassed. She stammered, "Well . . ."

"Quite. The Emir has European tastes. Once a governess arrives at the palace she finds it difficult to confine her duties to teaching a language. Fifty miles inland from Port

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Rabat it is five hundred years back in civilization. Have you any money?"

"None." The word was backed by a note of fear.

"Friends, perhaps in Cairo?"

"Yes."

"Then go back to them. A plane leaves here in an hour for Cairo. Take it."

Dr. Kang pulled out his wallet and handed the money in it to the girl. Maybe, he was thinking, it is the first sign of age that he should be so generous with the last of his money. Or maybe it was just that he wanted to annoy the Emir.

Later that afternoon, as Dr. Kang came out of his hotel bedroom, a door two rooms away from his own opened and a short, sallow-faced man came toward him. He wore a panama and carried a heavy stick. He stopped alongside Dr. Kang and his face was working with anger.

"So . . ." he spluttered. "Dr. Kang has become a good angel."

"Dr. Kang has no hope of ever achieving such an elevated condition, Monsieur Charap. Why are you so angry?"

"Why?" Monsieur Charap's eyes narrowed. "The girl is gone. And it was you who explained things to her. She left me a note saying why she has gone, and mentioning your name."

For a moment Dr. Kang was silent. The girl indeed was a fool to have mentioned his name.

"I merely explained that the climate would be bad for her. She must have misconstrued my words. But why should you worry? Governesses are easy to find even for the Emir."

"Not English ones. And the Emir has already paid me."

"Then pay him back, monsieur." But although he said it calmly, Dr. Kang was not fool enough to think that Charap would part with any money he already had, or let this interference with his arrangements go unrevenged. He had a feeling that it would be wise for him to leave Port Rabat. One did not steal titbits from a lion and wait around to see how the beast would take it. But unfortunately Dr. Kang no longer had any money.

"Somebody shall pay," snapped Monsieur Charap.

An hour later the matter of repayment was being arranged. Monsieur Charap, worried over the loss of his charge and the anger of the Emir, was with an Arab in a small room over a shop in the native quarter of Port Rabat. He and the Arab had often worked together.

"It will indeed be hard to explain to the Emir," said the Arab, flicking the sleeves of his robe back and reaching delicately for his cup of mint tea. "He was looking forward to the arrival of the English person. Also, I remember, that some weeks ago it was this same Dr. Kang who was involved in the matter of an arms deal. He had done this to spite the Emir."

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"Nothing short of the death of Dr. Kang will satisfy the Emir for the loss of this English person," said Monsieur Charap. "The Emir has carried her photograph around with him for weeks."

"You wish me to soften his disappointment?"

"I do," said Monsieur Charap savagely.

"It is easily managed. Tell me, what is the number of Dr. Kang's room at the hotel?"

"It is on the same floor as mine. Number ten."

"Then tonight I shall pay him a visit. It will be easy to bribe the hotel clerk for a passkey. Leave it all to me. It shall be taken care of, and when he is dead it is possible that the Emir—since he has no love for Dr. Kang—will not ask for his money back."

That night Dr. Kang—who had often been short of money before—was regretting his generous impulse. Port Rabat, he knew, had become unhealthy for him. The girl had been very stupid to have said that he had warned her. But then if she hadn't been stupid she would never have needed help. He sat in the lounge after dinner and kept an eye on Monsieur Charap. But the other man took no notice of him, and eventually went up to his room.

It was midnight before Dr. Kang went up to bed. Before he retired he locked his door and saw that the window was bolted. He lay in the darkness knowing that there could be little sleep for him.

It was three o'clock in the morning when the night clerk at the hotel desk, a Sudanese who knew better than to get in the way of the Emir's people, heard someone come across the deserted lobby. He opened one eye and watched a robed Arab approach the desk. Without a word the clerk pushed a passkey over the desk.

"It is understood," said the Arab, "that you are blind and deaf?"

"And I still sleep," said the clerk.

The robed figure glided away towards the stairs. The clerk sat there, glad that he would go off duty before the murder of Dr. Kang was discovered. He sat there listening and there was no sound except the tinkling of the fountain in the garden.

Five minutes later the Arab came quietly down the stairs and dropped the passkey on the desk. Just for a moment the clerk glimpsed a smear of blood on the man's hand and then the Arab was gone. He picked up the key, wiped off any fingerprints with his handkerchief, and then replaced it.

A few minutes later he was sleeping. He slept on until the clock struck six and the first shafts of morning sun through the lounge windows woke him. Then he sat up, yawned, and rubbed his eyes.

At that moment there was a sound from the stairs. He looked up. Dr. Kang was coming down, carrying

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his suitcase. The clerk's mouth gaped with surprise as Dr. Kang came to the desk, beaming.

"There is a Cairo plane at six thirty? Am I right?" he asked gently.

The clerk nodded.

Dr. Kang pulled out a wallet, a very fat wallet, from his pocket and put some money on the desk.

"This will take care of the bill. The change you can keep."

As he turned away, he paused and put his hand in his pocket.

"I was forgetting. Before you came on duty I borrowed this from the day clerk."

He dropped a screwdriver onto the desk. He went out chuckling and he continued to chuckle to himself long after he was safely on the plane.

Back in the hotel the body of Monsieur Charap—in Room 12—would soon be discovered in bed with a dagger through the heart. Room 10 which should have held the dead body of Dr. Kang would be neat and empty. When the Arab had come to do his work the numbers of the three rooms along the passage had read, 12, 11, and 10. And half an hour after the Arab had left Dr. Kang had made them read correctly again—10, 11, and 12. A man did not have to change his room to avoid death. It was easier to take the brass figure 0 from his own 10 and switch it with the brass 2 from Monsieur Charap's 12. And just as easy to walk along a verandah afterward and go in through a window to relieve the dead Monsieur Charap of the Emir's money . . . Without money how could a man ever afford to be generous?

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**FREDERICK NEBEL**
TITLE:	***No Kid Stuff***
TYPE:	State Police
DETECTIVE:	Kinsland
LOCALE:	Drum Ridge township
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*A restrained but vigorous study of a State Trooper who for months had been overcautious. Some of his coworkers thought he had lost his guts. But Kinsland wasn't yellow . . .*

THE BULKY TROOPER WAS SOFT on his feet for a man of his size. He was all the way across the bedroom, setting down his square strongbox, when Kinsland stirred on the cot against the opposite wall and kicked off the covers. Kicked hard, for Katherine Eaves was on his mind again.

"Uh?" Boagard said. "Wake you?"

"Uh-uh." Kin sat up. "Been awake on and off all night. How was yours out there on the Pike?" Kin was twenty-nine—six years a trooper.

"So-so. Okay." Boagard had put on his pajamas in the locker room. He rolled up the window shade, his broad face calm and remote in the windy sunlight. "A vag. Two drunk drivers. Changed a tire—some woman." He got into bed, unlocked the strongbox, and took out some pamphlets; and the next minute he was even more remote, absorbed in his reading, settled in solid, indestructible repose.

"Day off," Kin said, watching the wind skim brown November leaves across the parking lot. "I'm on duty tonight. Downstairs—not on patrol." He was always a little apprehensive these days about the night tour. But downstairs, on call, was better than the night patrol. It was six months, almost to the date, since his good friend had been killed. Boagard had been sent in from a post two hundred miles

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east to replace Harry Eaves. Harry had been young—a rookie, really—and he'd been lots of fun. Boagard was no fun. He was a fifteen-year man, giving out little, asking nothing; dedicated with quiet resolve to anything he set out to do; a competent police officer, strict and businesslike. Kin started to say what a wonderful day it looked out; but weather, fair or foul, never brightened or depressed Boagard.

Kin put on his bathrobe and went down two flights of stairs to the basement locker room. He showered and shaved, watching the clock, and took civilian clothes from his green metal locker. Katherine was on his mind most of the time; but after last night, more than ever. And now—the way her aunt had come out with it about Harry—Kin felt heartsick and lonely and a little desperate. For Katherine.

He skipped breakfast in the barracks dining room. Outside, the rollicking wind stirred his spirits; he swung his arms to ease the tension that always seemed to burn between his shoulder blades. He dropped his arms at sight of Stutz, the new commanding officer of the Drum Ridge barracks. "Morning, sir. Nice morning, after all the rain."

"Nice country," Stutz said, taking his prebreakfast walk up and down the parking lot. It was only his third month at Drum; he had been transferred from Post D in a tough industrial area three hundred miles south. "You're up early for a man on the long post duty tonight."

"I'll catch some sleep this afternoon." Kin slowed down. "Yes, sir?"

Stutz had started to say something. But he pivoted and scowled off on his brisk walk—a small man, one-half inch above the minimum height required; his body thin, supple at fifty. His small thin face seemed made up of a series of hard knobs—cheekbones, nose, the chin hardest and most prominent of all. His uniform was all spit-and-polish this morning, the flat-brimmed gray stetson tilted sharply over one ear. His eyelids blinked a lot, but the blinking in no way affected the glum, dead-level way he could peer at you. "Enjoy yourself, trooper," he grinned, on the lap back past Kin, and was off again, admiring the windy view of meadows and rolling hills. And the State Police flag cracking.

Kin drove down the hill to the village center, ate breakfast in a lunchroom and by eight thirty was parked in front of a shingled house eight blocks from the center, high on Church Street. In a little while Katherine came out, stood beside the car, and gazed down the street in wistful abstraction. "I wish you wouldn't, Kin." But she shrugged, anyhow, and got in beside him, giving him a morning-

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bright, friendly, altogether unsatisfactory smile. The kind she gave to patients, strange or familiar, as she greeted them in Dr. Wilmott's waiting room.

Kin said, "I'm sorry I blew my top at your aunt last night."

"I can't blame you. She—shouldn't have said that. But she couldn't help it—help herself. After all, Harry was her only son."

"She made me feel like a criminal when she said that if it wasn't for me he'd still be alive!"

She touched his arm lightly. "Kin, I am sorry—dreadfully sorry."

He almost started the engine then, but didn't; his hands were locked on the steering wheel, the knuckles white. "You say so. You say so, Katherine. But you, too—ever since it happened—you're shying away from me, ducking me; excuses and excuses. And even last night, the first time I've seen you in three weeks, you said nothing—nothing—when Aunt Grace let me have it."

Katherine's look was away from him, pensive. "I understand, I guess, something of what she feels. Besides, she's been like a mother to me; and Harry was almost like a brother." She touched her light brown hair absently and there was a small indecisive quiver at one corner of her mouth. But then she sat up straight. She shuddered. "When that awful news came over the radio last May—"

Her Aunt Grace had let him have that, too, last night—how Katherine had fainted after one rigid, terror-stricken moment and a wild scream that still haunted the brown-shingled house like a ghost.

Kin said now with great earnestness, "But things like that don't happen to experienced men. Harry was young, green, and you know yourself how reckless he was. Katherine, honest, I'm careful, cautious—why, nowadays, knowing how you feel, I'm the most cautious character—"

"Kin," she said, stopping him with the directness of her tone, "I couldn't take that kind of news again—or even anything like it. Kin, I've *had* it. I couldn't even take the chance. But please believe me, I don't blame you for helping Harry to make the grade at the police academy, even though Aunt Grace never wanted him to be a trooper. And as for the other thing—" She flushed a little, shook her head. "I—I don't even think Aunt Grace meant to say that." Then she brisked up all at once and glanced at her watch. "You understand, I'm sure, Kin. I'm sure you do. Everything. Me—and how I feel—anyhow. And you were sweet to pick me up this morning."

"I'm sweet," Kin said, starting the engine. "I understand," he said, taking off like a rocket. The speeding car churned up waves of brown leaves which the heavy rains had threshed from the trees.

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He slid the car into Dr. Wilmott's driveway on South Main and said, "I understand nothing."

She was out of breath from the mad ride, and trembling. She got out and said, "Please, Kin, don't—don't do anything reckless. For my sake, please."

"Why for your sake, please?"

She turned and ran, hop-skipping up the driveway, and after a minute Kin drove off. Slowly this time, coming back into focus again, back under the check-rein of care and caution he'd held on himself these past months.

He stopped at the cemetery and smoked a cigarette, all the way down, beside Harry Eaves's grave. The remembered hysteria in Harry's mother's voice last night made a pulse beat in Kin's throat.

That night back in May, at the last minute, late, Harry had substituted for Kin on the night patrol. And Harry'd been shot to death.

By seven, after supper in the barracks dining room, Kin was in uniform. The November wind all day had dried out the leaves and now they were rattling and scuffing against the windows like blown twigs. He moved restlessly from window to window: the trees out there, oaks, and maples, reeled and tossed in the moonlight and high up shredded clouds sailed fast, far off, over the Witch Hills. Behind him the police teletype clicked intermittently; DiPolo, the civilian dispatcher, talked lazily from time to time on the police radio with some patrol car or the district command post at Plummerston. McGraw, the night sergeant, spoke at odd intervals on the telephone.

"Checkers, Kin?" McGraw said at eleven thirty.

Kin cleared his throat. "Little headache, Mac." And went to the washroom at the back of the central room to take an aspirin. And then he was at the windows again, restive under the pall of inactivity yet vaguely apprehensive—tonight like any other he was on duty—that despite all his care and caution something, some night, would happen to him. He peered toward town, where Katherine was at a church supper.

"Kin," McGraw said at midnight, yawning, "how's to liven up a dull night by making us all a pot of coffee?"

Kin jumped at that. "Right, Mac." And he moved swiftly enough on long, lithe legs across the central room to the kitchen wing.

"He's sure changed," DiPolo said, making a complete turn on his swivel chair. "He gives me the creeps. Loosening his belt one minute, tightening it the next. Off in corners. Hesitating before he comes around corners."

McGraw said, "All right, all right," and scrubbed his red hair

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energetically with thick fingers.

"So all right, all right," DiPolo said, spinning the chair round again; he had dark, knowing eyes and a sly, teasing smile. "You like the kid, huh? Troopers always stick together, huh?"

McGraw opened a desk drawer for no reason whatsoever, then slammed it shut and beetled round the room, everywhere and nowhere.

"Could be," DiPolo said, "he lost his guts when—"

McGraw said, "Button up your loose mouth, Lulu. Belt out the midnight summary on the teletype to Headquarters and Plummerston. You just take care of your end, that's all." McGraw tramped over to the washroom.

DiPolo's soft whistling was somewhere between drollery and insolence. He drummed the keyboard with offhand efficiency. Kept on drumming, no let up, when a radio report started coming in. He glanced at the big electric clock above his head; he nodded, typed one-handed, wrote with the other hand on his sheet. The time he put down was 12:09.

"Boagard," he said when McGraw returned. "On the Turnpike trying to overhaul some throttle-happy drunk. Guy's weaving all over the place."

McGraw said, "Tell Boag not to knock his brains out on that. We can always get the drunk by his license number."

"You know the law, Mac, on drunk driving. Park the car, lock it, and bring the drunk to the barracks. Book him, toss him in the clink overnight—his operator's license automatically suspended till trial. You know Boag and you know the law. No guy laughs off eighty an hour with Boag—drunk or sober. Besides, can't read the license—mud on it."

Kin came in just then with cups and a pot of coffee on a tray. He'd heard the last part and asked what was up with Boagard; and when McGraw told him he fiddled with the knot of his tie and then made his belt a notch tighter. "He ought to be careful out there, Mac, even if he does overhaul the car." He poured the coffee, slopping some.

DiPolo said, "Boagard's a man for the book, all right. All he was trying to do in the first place was a favor—Chapter Twenty-one, Courtesy and Assistance to Motorists. He was cruising west on the Pike when he saw this car up ahead start off from the muddy shoulder. Then his headlights spotted something on the shoulder, he stopped, picked up a fedora and took off after the guy, to give it back and now—" He broke off, listening to the loudspeaker, nodding; he said, "Okay, Boag, I'll do that. Good luck." And then to McGraw: "You heard. The Hake Mountain road now, so it won't be long." He marked down the

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time—12:14—and chuckled. "Up hill, down dale, and either Boag will nail him or the guy'll fly off one of those hairpin curves. Don't bother him, you heard, with the radio; he's got all he can do to handle the wheel."

Kin said, "Hake's a bad road. Where they've straightened out some of those hairpins they left the old loops and a desperate man could scoot in there, brake sharp, sideways, then turn out his lights and jump. Hitting in there hard, a trooper would plow into it—"

"This is just some knuckle-head drunk, kid," DiPolo said. "Get the ants out of your pants and pass some coffee."

But at 12:20 McGraw said, "Get hold of Boag, Lulu. Never mind—I don't care what he said." But Boagard made no answer and that caused McGraw to get up and make a circle of the room. At 12:25 he told DiPolo to try again, and peered across the room, uncertain, where Kin stood by a window tugging this way and that at his belt.

"Nope," DiPolo said. And then he was half out of his chair and his coffee cup crashed on the floor. "Boagard? Boag—is that you, fella? Boag!" He was writing the time down—12:27—and then he was all the way up on his feet, still writing; but he shouted: "Mac!"

"Right here," McGraw said, at his elbow.

DiPolo still shouted. "All he could say was—'Doctor! Doctor!' Then it sounded like he dropped the phone."

McGraw pointed, said, "Okay, Lulu. Call a doctor. Call an ambulance. Get 'em started and tell 'em to wait at the Pike and Hake for further instructions." He wheeled about, almost smashing into Kin; he said, "Get going. Out Hake. Watch those old loops."

"And see can you get the lead out of your pants," DiPolo snapped.

Kin gave him a sad look. He said softly to McGraw, "Right, Mac," and put on his stetson and stretched his long legs, soft and fast, across the central room. His stomach was held in—tight, rigid—and the pounding of his heart reached to his eardrums.

"Ten minutes should do it," McGraw shouted after him.

DiPolo yelled, "If he can get the lead out!"

But it was almost twenty-five minutes. It was 12:50 when Kin picked up the radio-phone in his patrol car and said, "At last. And dead. Gunshot. Can't tell the mileage, because I've been up and down, in and out of those old loops. About five miles from the Pike. I'll stick a flare where this loop takes off from the new stretch of Hake. Tell the ambulance and doctor and anybody else about the flare, will you?"

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But first he protected the scene of the killing; placed flares in the center of the old blacktop loop, twenty feet in each direction from Boagard's patrol car. Then he drove an eighth of a mile and placed one at the juncture of the old and new roads. He returned to the scene and moved about swiftly, surely, with chalk and measuring tape, a clip-board under his arm, a small manila envelope tucked up under his hat. He measured and wrote on the clip-board and picked up things and put them in the envelope.

A patrol car from Drum, which had been marking time at the Pike and Hake, came sirening into the loop ahead of the village ambulance and slammed to a stop five feet from one of the flares. A trooper named Phelps jumped out with a big press camera, and the volunteer fireman who had driven the ambulance stepped down and was almost clipped by another Drum patrol car. The car slewed rear-end into the ditch. Decker, who had driven Phelps up, pulled open the door and saluted.

Stutz got out of that one on the off side and stood gazing glumly at it as the driver, a trooper named Priddy, came out of the bushes on the other side. "And a whole year out of the academy, too," Stutz said morosely. He wore a hurry-up, out-of-bed-and-dressed-in-five-minutes get-up—whatever he'd grabbed at first, and all of it pulled on over his pajamas. Torn white ducks with soiled knees, a brown turtleneck sweater, and a black chesterfield topcoat, open and flapping in the wind. On his completely bald head he wore an old navy watch cap, and he smoked a short-stemmed pipe.

"Doc get here?"

Kin said, "Not yet. No need now." He walked beside Stutz to Boagard's car while Priddy tagged along noting down the time—12:57—and writing other memoranda in shorthand on his clip-board sheet. The dead trooper was at the steering wheel, lying against it, one hand caught between the wheel and shift lever, the other hanging toward the floor. Stutz placed a hand on the dead man's shoulder; he neither pressed nor patted nor stroked. He left his hand there for a long minute, while brown leaves sailed round him. Then he took his hand away and turned around.

"What'd you find, Kinsland?" he said.

Priddy leaned in. "Sir, should I take down what he says in my shorthand notes?"

"You take yourself down the road to that flare and make sure the doctor turns in here. And stay there. We'll want the medical examiner too. In fact, that's an idea, right now. Radio the barracks to get him started, or we'll be here all night." He turned back to Kin. "Yes?"

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Kin stood with his clip-board tipped toward the headlights' glare, his head tipped too. "I've chalked on the road there—the two x's—where I believed Boagard stood when he talked with the driver. The chalked oblong would be the relative position of the driver's car. Between the line marking the driver's side of the car and the x's marking where Boagard stood, you see two small chalked circles. One is where I found a whole cigarette—the brand Boagard smoked—only singed a bit at the front end and hardly damp at all at the other end. That smaller circle marks a wooden match burned a quarter way. Boagard used a cigarette lighter. The two items are in this envelope."

"Any ideas?"

"Not much. Neither car was on the muddy shoulder at any time. The position of Boagard's car, and the place where he stood, seem to indicate that he saw the other driver swing into the loop. But instead of following him in, Boagard must have raced up the main road and swung into the loop at the other end. The drunk had to stop then or they'd have crashed head-on. You can see that the patrol car's facing back toward the Pike. The other car must have backed out to Hake and then gone on."

"Anything else?"

Kin hesitated. "Only a guess." He didn't want to say too much: there was always the chance, if he showed too much interest, advanced too many theories, that he might be assigned to the investigation. But Stutz's glum eyes were steady on him between blinking eyelids; and Kin said, "It looks as if Boagard might have been shot when the driver held out the wooden match to give him a light. If Boagard took time for a cigarette, it seems he must have known the driver and thought he could talk him into parking and driving to the barracks in the patrol car. I never knew Boagard well, but I don't think he'd have fooled around with a strange drunk."

Stutz kept blinking at him for another moment. Then he said, "Nice thinking." He turned and said, "Phelps! Pictures—all angles of Boagard. Then all directions from the car. Don't forget some angle shots of the chalked oblong—refraction from the flash might pick up some tire prints. Um, who's this?" he said as a taxi drove up.

Dr. Ackerman looked out and bellowed, "Out of gas again, right in my own garage. And Gus here never answers his taxi phone after midnight till it rings for five minutes."

Stutz said to Kin, "Mark the time—one-five." He pointed his knobby chin toward Ackerman and said, "The dead's man over there." Then he pointed his chin toward the patrol car.

But Ackerman was knocked a

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little off balance by the backswing of the door he'd flung open. He teetered, fumbling with two pairs of glasses; put the wrong pair on, took them off, and put on the other pair. Then he gangled headlong to the patrol car, reaching his hand out in front. He spent only a minute, then backed out of the car and straightened, a rawboned old man with his hat on the side of a white bush of hair.

"You know what I know," Ackerman said, wiping his eyes. "No need of going into details—you wouldn't understand them anyhow. And there'll be a P.M., besides. I'll give the medical examiner a ring soon as I—"

"We've notified him," Stutz said, and watched Ackerman gangle back to the taxi, fumbling again with his glasses and hitting the taxi sideways. "Y' know," he bellowed all around, then laughing, "just because my name makes me the first doctor you come to in the book, you don't have to feel you got to go by the alphabet." He was on his way the next minute, flapping his big bony hand out the window.

"Well," Stutz said glumly, "he dodders and flaps but finally gets on the job. One of the others won't come out after midnight without putting up an argument, and the other one takes his time dressing but at least he's pleasant and efficient when he does get on the job."

That one was Lincoln Wilmott, physician and, also, medical examiner for the township of 'Drum Ridge. He arrived—Stutz showed his wrist watch to Kin, who wrote down 1:26—in a run-of-the-mill two-door sedan. "Well, well, what have we here?" He was a husky man in robust middle age, bright and buoyant, popular after five years in town. "Has Dr. Ackerman been here?"

Priddy had come up with him from the junction, and now said, "With bells on, Dr. Wilmott. He must be in his seventies. You'd think he'd call it quits."

Wilmott looked at him, up and down. "Dr. Ackerman's seventy-nine. He hangs on, I suppose, because that's his whole life and always has been." He turned to Stutz. "It would be easier for me if you moved the body into the ambulance."

In ten minutes he was through, said he would make his report to the coroner; and he left with a pleasant nod.

Stutz looked around morosely, saying, "I guess that about wraps it up here for the time being. One of you boys will have to finish out Boagard's Pike patrol. Who?"

Kin hung in the background pretending interest in the notes on his clip-board. Stutz skimmed a glance toward him, paid no attention to Phelps's offer, nor to Priddy's desire to type up his shorthand notes. He gave a noisy blast through his pipe.

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"You, Priddy," he said. And to Kin: "I'll ride back with you, Kinsland. You, Decker," he said to the trooper who had come up with Phelps, "take back poor Boagard's buggy."

The brown leaves sailed and spiraled in the headlights' glare on the drive down the Hake Mountain road; they snapped and clattered against the car's underparts. Stutz was screwed up in the corner with his watch cap almost down to his eyebrows.

He said, "Kinsland, I've only been at Drum for about three months, and maybe I catch on slow. Anyhow, I don't get you."

"I'm sorry, sir." Kin was wary. He cleared his throat. "Haven't I been doing my work right?"

"By the book, yes. But when I first came here I went over the dossier on all the troopers. There's a lot in yours about initiative, alertness, competence, quick to take a calculated risk—stuff like that. On the ball. In there pitching extra innings." His pipe made a loud noise. "If you've got a beef against me, let's have it. And don't bother dressing it up with 'sir' this and 'sir' that. Dish it out."

Kin laughed outright, spontaneously. "What? For Pete's sake, sir!" And he dropped his guard. "If it was anything as simple as that—" He got his guard up again, quick. And because he didn't know how to explain himself, he lied. "Maybe for a while there—before you came—I was too much of an eager beaver. Too much of that stuff and you're in the other troopers' hair. You know?"

Stutz looked at his pipe and then spoke as if he hadn't been listening. "Could be," he said in a casual way, "you're losing your guts. Happens. Some get 'em back, some don't. Some don't try. They just stick it out—polite, respectful, sticking to the book. And comes pension time, they get the same as any other man. It's a living."

The taste in Kin's mouth was bitter, acrid. The lump that rose in his throat was soft and mushy and sickening. He hit the throttle, swung off Hake, and streaked up the Turnpike. He eased up only a little bit for the Drum Ridge exit and was on the throttle again, hard. He snaked the car viciously up the barracks driveway and slammed down the brakes in front of the square granite building.

Stutz yawned a little and rubbed his eyes. He got out of the car, said, "Kid stuff," and went inside.

They were all there in the central room when Kin slipped in a few minutes later. Troopers were all over the place—not a single man in bed upstairs. Reporters and news photographers had come in from the nearest city and were milling around along with a radio man lugging a tape recorder. McGraw looked beat-up by this time;

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so did DiPolo. Pots of black coffee, cups, plates of sandwiches were set up on a card table. Kin stood around on the edge of it all, listening.

Why, he kept asking himself, didn't anyone mention the reasonable similarity between the deaths of Boagard and Harry Eaves? He kept on listening, looking, but no one mentioned it. Why not? Or had he been too close to Harry's death, remembered too much or imagined too much? But on the night of May 10, late, a filling-station man on the Hillsboro road saw a police car flash past in pursuit of a speeder. Half an hour later, and only five miles from the filling station, the driver of a milk-tanker found Harry sprawled on the road twenty feet from his patrol car. Dead.

Harry had been shot clean through the heart and had died instantly. Had he been careless in not radioing to Drum that he was in pursuit of a stolen car? Or had he known the driver and, like Boagard, overhauled him and tried to reason with him? The consensus at the barracks was that Harry in his haste and inexperience, and not wishing to drive one-handed while using the radio-phone, had risked running down a known stolen car before first reporting in by radio. Well, Kin told himself, if that was the consensus—

"Hey, Kin. On the phone over here," McGraw yelled. He pointed to one of three on his desk. "That one. Katherine Eaves."

Kin picked it up. "Katherine?"

"Katherine! Yes, Katherine!" Her voice was high, strident, as if in wild outrage or anger. "And only inexperienced troopers get killed—killed!"

He ducked his ear away from the phone, baffled and tongue-tied. And the next instant he realized she had hung up. He stared stupidly at McGraw, who managed a wry, haggard grin, touching his own ear as if the stridency on the phone had reached him too. Kin looked ill. He turned and stared at DiPolo, who looked back at him with a kind of exhausted irony.

"Couldn't the Old Man even trust you to finish up the night patrol for poor old Boag? How'd you live with yourself, buster?"

Kin gave him a sad look, with no bewilderment in it. He said, "Say that again, Lulu. Tomorrow, sometime, when you know what you're saying."

"I'm saying it right now!" DiPolo shouted. "Yellow! Yellow!"

Kin looked around—at McGraw, at half a dozen other troopers; at Stutz in his corner office, who looked back, blinking, through the open door. "Warm in here—getting warm," Kin said. He looked again at McGraw, at his heavy red face, the beetling eyes, the massive hunched shoulders. "You think I'm yellow, Mac?" he said softly.

"Don't ask me," McGraw said.

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"You were told by somebody else."

"By a little guy, Mac. Five-feet-seven, about one-forty. You want to say it, Mac? If you do, let's go outside and you say it."

Stutz came out of his office, jangling keys on a ring. "Cut out this kid stuff. Kinsland, Boagard's keys. Go down and clean out his locker and bring the stuff to my office."

When Kin returned to the central room ten minutes later everybody looked washed out and the high crackling tension had passed. He carried an armful of clothing and the square strongbox to the corner office and they found the key to the box and opened it. Stutz called in McGraw to witness and itemize the contents. Two bankbooks, a sheaf of receipts, a Bible, a stack of old photographs, sixteen dollars in bills, a dozen pamphlets and a book, a bundle of letters—pink or blue paper—and a newspaper clipping of his wife's death five years ago. The quiet, tough, strict man's little hoard of things he must have considered too personal to leave lying about. The men around the desk read the clipping, shook their heads; and they leafed the pamphlets and only McGraw and Stutz shook their heads.

Kin didn't shake his head. He felt a slow crawling along his spine and his whole body stiffened as if to stop it. The pamphlets and the book reminded him of something—something Katherine had once told him, amused about it, laughing and forgetting it the next minute. As he had. "Sir," Kin said.

Stutz blinked at him.

"The man we want," Kin said, "might be right in town here."

Stutz said, "That's interesting. Who?"

"A friend, maybe. If it is, I'd like to see him, alone. If it is, there won't be any trouble."

Stutz looked at McGraw. "I'd be breaking every rule in the book if I let him do it his way—wouldn't I, Mac?"

"Yes, sir. Absolutely."

Stutz's pipe gurgled. "Go ahead, Kinsland," he said. "I've been out on a lot of limbs in my time." He blinked after Kin as the trooper left the office. He said to McGraw, "Good sergeants try to cover up for their troopers, Mac. Maybe one of them'll have to cover up for the commanding officer."

"I tell you this, sir. I sure escaped the beating of my life a little while ago. And you know what? I don't think it was anything DiPolo said that burned him. I think it was his girl—on the phone. She damned near took his ear off!"

"A little here, a little there—it all adds up, piles on. You think she hit him with something? Good. Maybe I'd better call her back and congratulate her. If I can stay awake long enough."

Kin walked along the side of the darkened house to the front porch and pressed the white button be-

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neath the sign lettered Night Bell. He heard, after a minute, the thump and scuff of footfalls, the clatter of something knocked down—wood against wood. A light shone through milky glass panels on each side of the door. The porch light went on and the door was flung open.

Kin said, "Doc."

"No! Again?" Ackerman bellowed, pushing his glasses up his nose. "Oh—you, Kin. Didn't quite make out the face, but the uniform —My phone not working?"

"Can I come in, Doc?"

"Can you come in! Sure, sure. You hurt, boy?" He gangled off into the frowzy living room, sideswiping an old bamboo whatnot that shook, rattling the bric-a-brac on its shelves. He got the room lights on, saying, "Come on, right here, boy, and let's have a look."

"I'm not hurt, Doc," Kin said. "You sit down, will you, please? I'd like us to have a little chat."

Ackerman reared back, glaring. "Chat! What in the blasted time of night is this for a chat? I've been up half the night and I've got to get up at six—"

"It's tough, Doc," Kin nodded. "And you want to hang on. You don't want to let go. You'd do anything so you could hang on."

Ackerman bellowed, "You're right tootin' I would. All hours, bad eyes, shaky knees, but"—he thumped his chest—"I got it in here, boy—here in the heart, where it counts. For me and for the people that call me up all hours because they need me—not any doctor—*me!*—and not because I'm the best doctor in the world. I'm not, damn it, by a long shot. But I got it—in here—right in here—" He broke off, reared back again. "You sick, boy? Hurt?" Then he bellowed, "No? Then get out!"

The hoarse bellowing, the wild glaring eyes, made Kin cautious—but cat-cautious, cool and ready for anything, ready to move toward it. Not cautious the way he'd been for months—cutting corners and dodging and ducking and twisting away like a ballet dancer. Away from what? From the fear of losing Katherine and of not wanting to hurt her, worry her, by taking risks. But Boagard—poor Boag—had taken all that right out of his hands. Boagard, an experienced trooper, had been trapped and murdered just like the rookie Harry Eaves. And Katherine had hit him hard with her strident anger, hurling him right out of her life.

"You gonna get?" Ackerman blared, picking up a poker from the fireplace.

Kin's hand slid along past his belt buckle, stopped short of his revolver. He said, "Did Harry Eaves ever stop you on the highway for something or other and then let you go?" He'd handle it without a gun.

Ackerman looked at the poker, confused. "Harry Eaves? Oh—

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him." He slammed the poker down and shouted, "Of course he did. Once, out there on—I can't remember where—but I was looping all over the road—" He stopped, put his head down, and squinted at Kin. His voice came out thin, between pursed lips: "What 're you getting at, boy?"

"Were you drunk, Doc?" Kin said, "and all over the road?"

Ackerman grabbed the poker.

"Don't try it, Doc," Kin said. "There's at least five gallons of gas in your car in the garage. Why did you use a taxi?"

Ackerman roared, "Of course there is, trooper! I'd never get Gus out in his taxi again this late, so I had him siphon some from his car into mine—case I was called out quick again, emergency." He slammed the poker down on the floor. "And I was slewing around all over that road because of my glasses. I can't stand bifocals—and besides, I need three pairs. One for close up, one for where you are, one for driving. And I never can get out with the right ones, or all three." Then he looked disgusted. "Do what you want—go or stay—but I'm going back to bed." He shook a long, bony finger from the doorway. "And I haven't touched a drop of liquor in twenty-five years, since the day they carried me home on a shutter from a clambake." He glared. "*You* drunk, boy?" And he went on upstairs, scuffing and growling.

Kin left. He stood on the sidewalk, tapping his belt—more alert now than ever, his body feeling as if it were strung out like a wire, taut and strong. He drove the patrol car south on Main and parked in front of the white house opposite St. Andrew's Church. There were lights on upstairs. He remained in the car, watching a dim figure move out of the darkness in front of the high hedge.

"Kin!"

"Katherine?"

Then she was in the car, hugging his arm with both of hers. He could feel her shaking, but he watched the lights upstairs. She was saying, "I turned on the radio when I got home from the church supper after midnight—and I couldn't go to bed. I knew you'd be out there, somewhere. I—I phoned to see if you were all right, safe; and then when you were—I don't know why"—she held on to his arm—"I just—just blew my top at you: The way Aunt Grace did to me, years ago, when I got lost in the woods and she hunted hours for me and when she found me—"

"Yes, Katherine," he said. She was there, clinging to his arm, and that was enough. And he was watching the upstairs windows: at one of them, for a moment, Dr. Wilmott's face appeared. Then one of the lights went out and Kin said, "What are you doing here, Katherine?"

"Stutz phoned me fifteen min-

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utes ago to congratulate me. He didn't say why. He just said you were out on the town, on a secret mission, trailing a big bad wolf. Then somebody there laughed and Stutz said, 'Kid stuff,' and hung up. It sounded silly until I remembered—" She sat back. "Kin, what *are* you doing here?"

He said, "I'm a cop asking questions, Katherine. You must have come here for a reason. Why?"

"I—I was afraid for you, with the things, little things, itching me since the radio news first started coming in about a drunken driver."

"But why here?" Kin said.

She held her face in her hands. "I keep trying not to believe it, but it keeps after me now—knowing about Boagard and what he said in Dr. Wilmott's office the day he came in for his physical. Weren't we kidding around about that a little a couple of months ago?"

"I was trying to remember it. Then something in Boag's strongbox brought it back to me, and tied in. And I went to Doc Ackerman's, remembering a long way back how my folks said he used to hit the bottle." He shook his head. "But it's not Doc Ackerman. You," he said, "must think it's Wilmott. Why? An hour or so after Boagard's death Wilmott was out there at the scene, all bounce and efficiency."

She was trembling, bewildered and uncertain. "People almost always accept a doctor when he moves into town and starts practicing. They don't stop and ask themselves—I didn't, did you?—why a doctor should come from far away, at the age of forty-five, and start a new practice in a strange place. You don't ask if he *had* to leave the place he came from."

"You've seen Wilmott drunk?"

"No, never. But he's always chewing chlorophyll tablets. But mainly the oxygen tank in the office. I use it mostly for metabolism tests and penicillin sprays; but it can sober you up fast too. We use too much!"

Another light went off upstairs. Kin stirred and said, "I'll have to go in and ask a few questions."

Katherine held him by the arm again, hard. "Kin, please! Maybe we're both wrong but—but he likes to hunt and he has all kinds of guns—rifles—pistols. And Kin—" Her small, choked laugh was a little hysterical. "Kin, that awful night last spring. The first radio report was wrong—the one I heard. Somebody at the barracks didn't mark it down when you had to rush to the hospital about your dad and because of that Harry took over for you. The relief dispatcher who came on that night assumed it was you out there in that car—not Harry. I—I fainted because I thought it was you—"

He gave her a light pat. "You run now, hon. Everything 'll be okay. I'll give you a ring after."

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She got out and stood for a minute with the door open, her face still and pensive but with a fond smile moving along her lips. She said, "No, don't ring, Kin. I'll learn to worry and worry—and wait. I've worried all along, all summer and fall. I always will. But you'll come home and I'll see you—and all the worry in the world will be worth that. If you want to, come for breakfast."

"I'll be there, hon," he said, stepping out the other side.

"Kin," she said, turning a dozen feet away, "what did Stutz mean by kid stuff?"

Kin said, "Run along now, honey, beat it." And when she was out of sight he looked up at the house, where only one window showed a dim light and a face flashing past. Kin got back into the car and radioed the barracks. Stutz was at the other end.

"Mac's taking forty winks," Stutz said, "and Lulu's sick to his stomach. Some ball here tonight. What's with you?"

"I think the man we want is Dr. Wilmott. I'm parked in front of his house. He's upstairs pacing back and forth."

"Why Wilmott?"

"I think the reason Wilmott stopped on the Turnpike was to smear mud on his license plate so it couldn't be read. The wind blew his hat off, he saw headlights way up the Pike and didn't want to be seen staggering around after his hat. At Boagard's last physical he was overheard to say that he had no use for M.D.'s but he had to conform to the regulations. The news clipping in the strongbox said his wife died five years ago in the operating room. Maybe he blamed the surgeon, right or wrong—and probably Boagard was wrong. And those pamphlets on healing by faith—Boagard was always reading those. I don't think Boag was gasping for a doctor. I think he was trying to tell us a doctor's name."

Stutz said, "Maybe you've got something. Going in after him?"

"Anything you say, sir."

"I say that if a doctor killed a cop in order not to have himself exposed as an irresponsible drunk driver, he'll kill another before he'll be taken in. I say stay right where you are until we get there. That's an order. No kid stuff."

"Right. No kid stuff."

In three minutes a car with a red blinker on top swung into Main past St. Andrew's Church. Another was right behind it. Then a third. Kin turned on his own blinker as the cars converged. One stopped in the street. One drifted slowly up the driveway and around back. One parked in the driveway.

Upstairs, the last light went out.

There was an explosion inside the house.

"Um," Stutz said, sucking on his pipe.

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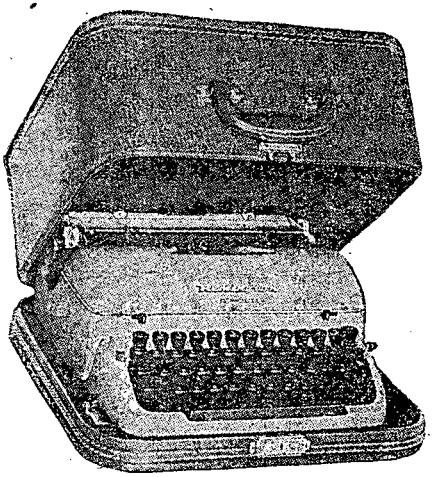

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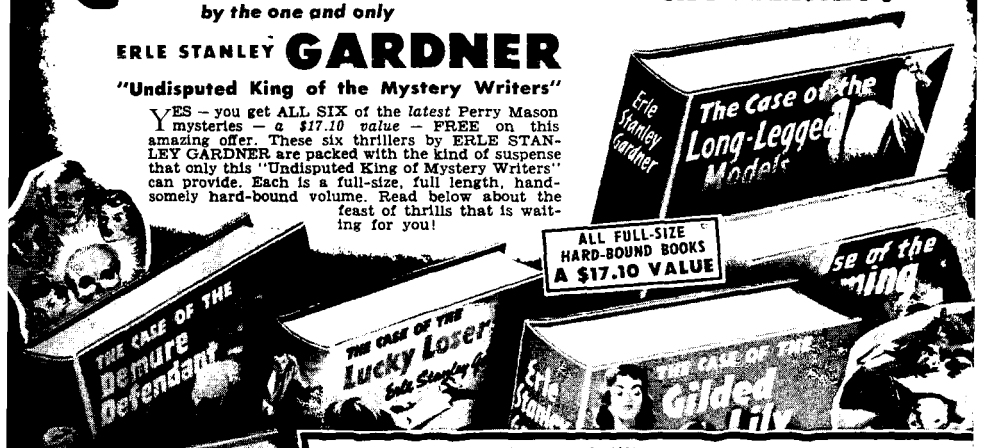
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